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RPGA® NETWORK

Take A Byte

The Grey Isles Await Across A Silt Sea

by Erlene Mooney

There will be more to S.S.I.'s DARK SUN™ world computer adventures than the initial game, *The Shattered Lands.*

Dave Shelley, associate producer of the game, is hard at work on an expansion disk that is scheduled to hit the shelves in June.

The expansion is tentatively titled *The Grey Isles.* The Isles is a supplement, not a stand alone game, Shelley explained. Computer gamers must own *The Shattered Lands* to use the Isles addition.

There are two ways to use the expansion. Gamers who have completed *The Shattered Lands* can load the game and the supplement, and their characters will be teleported to the Isles.

Or, Shelley added, gamers can use the main game and the supplement at the same time. To find the Grey Isles if you haven't finished the main game, your characters must march across the wilderness and locate a tunnel that will take you to the Isles.

The information a player accumulates by playing *The Shattered Lands* will help in *The Grey Isles.* Shelley emphasized that computer gamers do not need the Isles supplement to enjoy the initial DARK SUN™ computer game.

About The Isles

The Isles used to be well-populated for a place in the wasteland of Athas, Shelley said. However, the Athasian dopplegangers came along and changed that. Athasian dopplegangers are more dangerous and terrifying than dopplegangers from other AD&D® game worlds. He added that players will not initially know they are facing dopplegangers as foes (except for readers of the POLYHEDRON® Newszine who have this first-hand information).

The dopplegangers infiltrated the Isles, feeding off the negative emotions of the people. Posing as residents, they worked to spark wars and destroy towns.

When a player's characters come upon the Isles, the dopplegangers present are third-generation. The PCs will have to discover which NPCs are and are not dopplegangers and discover how to defeat the Athasian dopplegangers.

"They will have to find a device to overcome the doppleganger ruler," Shelley said. And it will not be easy.

The dopplegangers have created a maze to trap people. The dopplegangers' goal is to frustrate and eventually kill the victims, feeding off the trapped people's anger and fears, he explained.

The plot of *The Grey Isles* was devised by Shelley, with the input of a few coworkers. He said work began on the project in April, 1992. Working on Isles and *Shattered Lands* at the same time helped to ensure that the Isles smoothly expanded the computer DARK SUN world.

The Grey Isles will include new stories, art, and sound for the DARK SUN computer campaign. It probably will come on three high-density disks and take up five to six megs of hard disk space, he said.

This is the first time S.S.I. has created a supplement for a role playing computer game, Shelley said. Other companies have created supplements for flight simulators and war games. Those include more missions to fly or battles to fight. Role playing supplements take additional work, he said, adding he believes the first role playing computer game on the market to have a supplement was Ultima VII.

The supplement is an experiment for S.S.I., Shelley explained. "All of our other games have been stand-alones. Although you could transfer characters across to other games." Whether S.S.I. does additional supplements for this or other role playing computer games will depend on how well *The Grey Isles* sells and the gamers' reactions.

"I think people will like it," Shelley speculated. "They can put it together with *The Shattered Lands* and have an even bigger game. You'll get a steadily bigger and bigger world."

The supplement will not be as expensive as a complete game. *The Grey Isles* will retail for $39.95, but probably can be found for as low as $30 at some discount computer software houses, Shelley said.

What Next?

Plans are to release *The Shattered Lands* and *The Grey Isles* together on one CD rom disk by the end of the summer. The game will have an improved soundtrack, digitized voices, and full-screen cinematic art, Shelley said.

And there's more of the DARK SUN world in store for gamers, he added. A second DARK SUN world computer game should be out around Christmas 1993 on high density disks, and later on CDs. Tentatively called *The Ivory Triangle,* the game will tie to *The Shattered Lands* and *The Grey Isles.*

Computer gamers will not need either of the previous two releases to play Ivory, Shelley said. However, PCs brought over from the earlier game will have an edge because they likely will be more powerful and have more items.

The goal of *The Ivory Triangle* will be to take a city from the templars, he said.

Computer Game Hints

Newszine readers will have an edge in playing the DARK SUN computer game, thanks to Shelley.

"When your characters are in the slave pens, talk to as many different people as possible to gain information and find out how to escape. But don't blindly believe everyone." He said be careful, however, not to talk too long, as the arena battles your characters are taken to will get more and more dangerous—until your characters don't come back. Slave pen guards can be bribed, he added.

"Later in the game in the sewers, you'll learn it's not only humans who can be talked to," Shelley hinted. "If it doesn't look human, it's not necessarily something to hack to pieces. Shelly also said that talking to something might be a better approach than fighting. The program is sophisticated enough so that you actually can negotiate with the creatures you meet. This option might not occur to gamers who are accustomed to simpler programs.

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About the Cover

Artist Clyde Caldwell expertly painted this saurian alien who could be a native on one of your science fiction campaign's barbarian worlds.

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Notes From HQ

Submitting Tournaments To The Network

The RPGA Network sanctions tournaments for various role playing games from companies throughout the industry. These tournaments are written by you, the members.

You don't have to attend conventions to write tournaments. It's simply fun and rewarding to write. But why pen a tournament if you're not going to see it played? You certainly can use the adventure for your own gaming group—and you might see it in print in the POLYHEDRON® Newszine. The adventures that appear in the Newszine were first run as tournaments at conventions.

Many of our veteran tournament authors—Don Bingle, Linda Bingle, Nicky Rea, Tom Prusa, Walt Bass, Wes Nicholson, and others—have received freelance writing assignments from TSR, Inc. and other game companies because of the quality of their Network tournaments. Writing tournaments—writing good, solid tournaments—can help you become a better writer.

Tournament writing guidelines, ethics guidelines, and Standard Disclosure Forms are available by writing Network HQ. Send all tournaments for TSR, Inc. game systems to Norm Ritchie, here at Network HQ. Refer to last issue and this issue for addresses of other game companies.

Norm has been handling Network tournament submissions and convention requests for tournaments for more than a year. He has this to share:

I wanted to take this opportunity to discuss our tournament program. When I began in this position, there were some problems as I got used to my new job. Frankly, I was not expecting the volume of requests that we received for tournaments from conventions, and I was a little overwhelmed. I fell behind in my mailings and some conventions received their materials with much less lead time than they should have.

That has changed, and we are now filling most tournament requests approximately two months before the conventions. However, to do this, we need to have request forms and tournament submissions in our hands well before that.

In the past, our deadline for tournament paperwork and submissions of events for specific conventions was six months prior to those conventions. The problem was that this deadline was almost never enforced and everyone knew it. Since we now are supplying events for more than 120 conventions every year, we are not going to be able to keep our mailings on a timely schedule if we remain as lax on deadlines as we have been in the past.

Therefore, we are setting new deadlines for tournament request forms and submissions which will be strictly enforced. These deadlines are a little more comfortable for conventions. All tournament request forms must be received by us at least three months before a convention. If the convention staff is submitting tournaments to be used at a specific convention, they must be submitted at least four months in advance. The deadlines for the GEN CON® Game Fair have not changed: submissions are still due by January 1st.

These deadlines are firm. We cannot provide material on time if we do not receive tournament requests and submissions on time. It's that simple.

Since that's out of the way I would like to ask some favors of everybody who plans to write tournaments for us. These may seem like minor points, but when you get 200 + submissions every year, minor points can become a big deal. First of all, if you want to reserve your tournament as a first-run event at a specific convention, please say so when you submit it. Several times a year we get submissions, and after I've sent the tournaments off to various conventions, I get a letter or phone call letting me know that those tournaments were meant for another convention as a first-run event.

Also, please label all parts of your submission, including disks. We have a lot of paper floating around here, and things can get separated. Please label each page of maps with the tournament title. The best format for us to receive tournaments is as ASCII or Word Perfect 5.1 file. We can also run most Macintosh disks without much trouble. If you send me a floppy disk, I can make minor changes here and be all set to run with it. If you can only send a copy on paper, that's fine, too. I will probably mark any changes needed on the copy and send it back for revision. Then, once we have a clean final copy, we can usually photocopy what we need until we can get a kind volunteer to type it into a computer for us. Once a tournament is in final form, we put it into our mainframe. When we do this, all special codes that give your tournament headlines, imbedded maps, and fancy fonts are lost. If you have illustrations or map files please just send us a hard copy. We will keep this on file and make copies to send with the tournaments.

We have to do this since the line printers that are our most economical way of mass producing scenarios are hooked up to the mainframe.

Another subject that I may as well address is our backlog of submissions. We have three rather large file drawers of old submissions. These are getting looked at as quickly as possible. It will eventually all be reviewed. This is a slow process, but it is progressing. The truth is we are trying to keep up with new submissions and take care of the backlog as we go along. Our priorities are: 1) submissions for specific conventions (these have a deadline) 2) new tournaments with no specific use in mind 3) work on the backlog.

Add these game companies to your list of where you should mail tournaments:

Steve Peterson
Hero Games
P.O. Box 699
Aptos, CA 95001-0699

Champions, Fantasy Hero, Justice Inc., Star Hero, Cyber Hero or other Hero System submissions

Rick Loomis
Flying Buffalo, Inc.
P.O. Box 1467
Scottsdale, AZ 85252-1467

Tunnels & Trolls; Mercenaries, Spies, & Private Eyes

Well, that's all I have for now. Thanks for listening, write *good* tournaments, and look for me at the Game Fair.

Best,

Norm Ritchie

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Letters

More Thoughts On Young Gamers

After reading John Reynolds' letter in issue #77 (kids are gamers, too). I went back and read the original cause for the concern (#71 Youth and Logic Puzzles). Once I did, I thought—oh, yeah. These guys are right. Your responses were right on the mark.

I'd like to put in my two coppers worth. First, I'm a gamer and a parent. My 10-year-old daughter likes to play the basic DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game. Things are somewhat simplified for her sake (for example, we offer her the choices of actions possible and then discuss the possible outcomes of those actions). But we, the gaming group, allow her to make those choices. And, most of all, she has fun playing!

Second, as a parent I can use the game as a teaching tool. This is great for spending quality time with my child, and it offers more involvement in my child's activities. I feel that RPGs, if used effectively, have more potential than just mere entertainment (although they are entertaining!).

Third, if we as adults want better gamers, we should start with youngsters—whether they be our own children or our siblings—and teach them how to be better gamers. The best way to accomplish something is by example. Allow them to join the gaming group and give them all the encouragement you can muster. It'll be worth it later on. This can only benefit everyone.

Thank you for allowing me to say my piece.

Tracy Greathouse
Bedford Heights, OH

I am firmly and loudly against creating a 16-and-under tournament division. I, like Mr. Reynolds, began gaming at a very young age—eight years old to be exact. I began judging at age 10. The first convention I ever attended was Origins '87 in Baltimore at the tender age of 15, and it was the first time that I was able to participate in the unadulterated fun and excitement of an RPGA® Network event. Yes, there were problems with organization and finding enough judges to run the events—so what! It was one of the best times of my life.

Origins '87 was also the first time I ever judged a tournament. Yes, at 15 years old I was judging a Network tournament. In fact, I ended up judging EVERY single round of the AD&D® game feature from the first preliminary rounds right through the final round. I lived at the Lord Baltimore Hotel, though I am sure that Jean has forgotten the skinny blond kid with glasses struggling with the reams of printouts and the prejudice of many older players, who assumed that they were going to be shorted by this young "whipper-snapper."

I am very proud to say that although I was an extreme neophyte at judging, many of those same players came to me after the games AND after the winners were announced to tell me how much they enjoyed gaming with me. I may be tooting my own horn, but I think this goes to show that just because one is older does not necessarily make one perfect. The amount of experience that I gained in those two hectic, burger-filled days was tremendous. I learned more about playing and judging than in seven years of constant play. Yet, I would like to think that I was not the only person to gain something from the experience, and that many of the older players realized that we young 'uns had just as much imagination as them. It turned out that one of the young players provided me with the most amusing moment of the convention when he got into an argument with a weed by using a *speak with plants* spell. Sure it was weird and a bit immature to argue with a weed about where you were going to walk, but in the end the player's character managed to talk the weed into giving up information about an ambush ahead.

The most important point of any game is to have fun. This has been said so many times that I'm sure people are sick of hearing it. But let's remember that fun knows no age barriers. I am 21 years old now and would welcome any young gamers into my gaming group. Freshness and imagination often overcome inexperience and youth. Please, please do not deprive these younger gamers OR these older gamers who may not be aware of the contributions they have to offer. It is only by working together that we can learn, improve, and grow. In case anyone is interested, I am also in favor of young game masters. After all, they can be better than you think.

Tony Stocker
Annapolis, MD

Tony, I remember you. Origins '87 was my first major convention as Network Coordinator. We had too few referees, our gaming rooms were two blocks from the convention center, and there were a myriad of other problems. A couple of

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The Everwinking Eye

Temples, Cults, And Idle Gossip in Thentia

by Ed Greenwood

"It's in the cold north, lass, that the true riches lie—under the watchful eyes of flind, ogres, trolls, dragons, and worse, mind! Beware the dragons, most of all!"
Arakh Ongolier, Bard and Sage of Suzail, spoken to the bard (and Harper) Alarintha Sharnsilver,
Year of The Snarling Snowleopard

When last we visited, Elminster was telling me about the goddess Selune and how she is revered in the Moonsea coastal city of Thentia. We'd best finish with that matter by looking at how she is formally worshipped there.

The faithful make plentiful offerings of silver (never gold) to Selune at The House of the Moon. The High Priestess of this temple, Sureene Aumratha (CG hf P12), has more coin to spend than any three of Thentia's noble families put together. She has invested it wisely in shipyards and caravan wagon and sledge manufacturing.

The temple is cozy and well-appointed. Its six priests and 28 priestesses work diligently in the service of Selune; they are slowly increasing both the ranks of the faithful and their own power.

The temple occasionally sponsors adventuring groups. Each such group always includes two or three priestess, who have three-fold missions: to gain experience (and become more powerful characters), to gather information about the outside world, and to bring back any treasure they may find along the way.

The temple is said to have a small network of agents who gather information in cities around the Dragonreach and relay it via traveling priests of Selune back to The House of the Moon. Priestesses have sometimes been known to reveal helpful information to devout worshippers who, in their prayers at the temple, manage to ask the right questions about their own future plans and activities.

Persistent rumors link the Thentian archmage Flamuldinath "Firefingers" Thuldoum (CG hm W18) romantically with Sureene. Flamuldinath is known to visit the temple fairly often, and has tutored Sureene's two deputies. However, no more of this matter is known with any certainty to Elminster or to anyone outside the upper ranks of The House of the Moon's clergy.

Sureene's two deputies are the sorceresses Jannatha Goldenshield (CG hf W10) and Baerimel Dunnath (CG hf W9). Both are beautiful but very short and slim, almost childlike in stature. They often slip about the city in disguise, spying on citizens and visitors alike—or taking their measure of adventurers encamped near the city by appearing at their firesides posing as hungry waifs (sometimes pretty female ones), and seeing what treatment they get.

Both sorceresses are said to have impish senses of humor. They enjoy watching the exploits of adventurers and have been heard making bets on whether a particular band will succeed in something—or survive it. They also delight in confounding the Zhentarim whenever possible. The fact that they are both still alive attests to their skill in this last endeavor.

There was once another major temple in Thentia, to Waukeen—but it was blasted apart and burned with its clergy inside it some twelve winters ago. No melted coins or shattered gems were found in the wreckage, so the disaster was attributed (correctly) to the only nearby folk Thentians think dastardly enough to rob and then destroy a temple—the Zhentarim. It is whispered in the city that the Zhentarim gained so much gold in that dark deed that they lacked the magic to transport it all away, and that some lies hidden somewhere in the city even today.

This rumor is true, in a way. Although several thousand cart-loads of gold were whisked away by the Dark Wizards, they left behind (in two hollow spires atop two houses owned by Zhent merchants at either end of the city) about 8,000 pieces of gold. These funds are used by Zhentarim agents operating in the city—and are guarded by hunting spiders, one lairing in each spire. The merchants who live below keep the spiders fed. (Hunting spiders are fully detailed under "Spider, Subterranean" in the Realms sourcebook *FOR2/The Drow of the Underdark*). The merchants watch the hiding places fairly closely; a network of rooftop threads ring bells in the houses if disturbed. False alarms are rare, because birds innocently lighting on the roofs don't ring a succession of bells the way a climbing creature does. When an alarms sounds, apprentice wizards who dwell with each merchant as bodyguards can quickly create dark horrors (Darkenbeasts, detailed in the third *Monstrous Compendium* appendix) to attack or pursue the thieves.

The Bright Blade

Although there are no other major temples in Thentia, there are many minor shrines—and one darkly relevant piece of local lore.

In ancient times, Thentia was the site of a cult, The Bright Sword, that worshipped an intelligent, magical blade. This flying long sword is said to still lurk in the dark underways of the city—flooded cellars linked by sewers to the Moonsea and to every grand house.

It is said that the sword can fly up into these cellars, emerging on rare, random nights to slay and mutilate. Some folk still worship and obey The Bright Sword. Characters who carry magic items are advised to be wary when in the city: the Sword has its spies, and covets such magical items as priceless treasures for its own use. The few who have encountered The Bright Sword and lived to tell the tale say it strikes underwater at those swimming or wading in the sewers, and that it flees from strong foes, leading them into traps where magical items it has animated are gathered—such as entire suits of magical armor, which rise, empty, to swing blades at its bidding!

Elminster believes this blade still exists, and that its proper name is Beirmoura, "The Bright Blade." Enchanted long, long ago by a wizard who sought to defeat the rising kingdom of Netheril with a score of such blades.

This intelligent weapon is a *long sword +4* of chaotic neutral alignment. It can fly at MV 16 (A), can *detect invisible beings and objects* in a 10' radius, can use *ESP* three times per day (30 yard range, lasts 1 round), and always turns spells cast at it (just like a *ring of spell turning* except that the turning score always is 100%, see DMG page 150).

Heat, fire, and electricity do not harm

Beirmoura. The sword does not turn *magic missiles*, they actually heal the sword. Beirmoura gains as many hit points as the *missiles* normally would deal in damage. Any "extra" hit points gained in this way are permanently retained by the weapon, increasing its total. Beirmoura is AC −2, and currently has 62 hit points.

The sword is vulnerable to cold, and cold-based attacks gain a +2 damage bonus to each die.

Beirmoura has an intelligence of 17, an ego of 19, speech (Common, Dwarvish, Elvish, Ogre, Orc, and Troll), telepathy, and the ability to read languages and magic. It has at least one other major power; yet even Elminister does not know what it is. Likewise, the exact limits on the sword's power to animate magical items is not known—it does not seem to be able to "steal" magical items from a creature and use them against the owner during an encounter. However, it clearly can lay claim to unattended magical items and use them in its traps.

Elminster cannot decide if the blade has some fell intelligence trapped inside—perhaps a tanar'ri or other being of magical power (such as a wizard) slain by the blade, or sacrificed in its making—or if there is some darker secret behind its powers and continued survival.

Adventurers are warned to guard themselves well in Thentia; the Bright Blade has struck silently on many a night, felling a sleeping adventurer and stealing valuable magic.

Knaves and Scoundrels

There are few sneak-thieves in Thentia, they do not tend to live long. Nevertheless, there are plenty of con artists and slick merchants: "Most Thentish rogues sit right in front of ye," Elminster rumbled. "Fleecing ye as ye draw breath!"

There are, however, stories of the fabled thieves of old. One of the most famous concerns Yalaith Oruboryl, a lady of high standing who made a career of slipping away with amorous suitors at parties, then drugging them. Once her victims were subdued, she broke into their coffers and threw coins and jewelry out a window to an accomplice below. She would then reappear at the festivities. She was never suspected because she was never caught with any loot.

Yalaith revealed her secret on her deathbed, as a happy, wizened old lady of ninety-four winters. Spells were used upon her corpse to confirm the truth of her tale. Today, Thentian merchants, when far from home, may reveal their origins to other Thentians by flipping a coin down on a table using two fingers of their left hands; this custom began in homage to the famous lady thief of the parties.

Elminster warns that not all such thieves may have retired.

When I pressed Elminster for more details of Thentia, he shrugged and said, "Moneygrubbers both make me yawn and get under my skin. And a whole city of them? Leave us pass on to other matters." And so we will.

Wilds of the Northern Moonsea

East of Thentia lie only the ruins of cities. No permanent habitation is kept by men on all that stretch of the northern Moonsea shore. Orcs, goblins, kobolds, and worse infest this land; the wise travel here only in large, well-armed groups.

Somewhere in this rolling, stony wasteland lie the lost treasures of Beldoran, the first (and only) human King of Thar. Beldoran won his throne by vanquishing the local ogres with his armies. His reign was long, but troubled by many wars.

Beldoran's kingdom was exhausted in constant fighting with ogres and other fearsome creatures—trolls, yeti, flinds, and goblinkin of all sizes and numbers—who sought to recapture the lands the beast-men had held for so long. Beldoran fell with the last of his court in his palace, a simple tower and walled stableyard called Nouth.

The orcs who slew Beldoran tore Nouth apart stone by stone in their fury and greed, searching vainly for the fabled wealth of this hated human intruder—but were in turn slaughtered by ogres rushing down out of the mountains to be in at the kill.

Beldoran's queen was the archmage Lahaera Bheltiir (CG hf W21), who Beldoran had sent to Cormyr ostensibly on a diplomatic visit, but in reality because he wanted her to survive the doom he knew he could not escape.

Lahaera returned too late to rescue Beldoran, but not too late for vengeance. In her grief she devastated the battlefield, and all who were there, with great balls of roaring flame and convulsions of the earth. Those who did not perish in the fire vanished into rents that opened in the ground like hungry mouths and closed again, and Nouth and all its slain were lost.

Lahaera returned to her family in Teziir, and never sought to find Beldoran's gold and gems (if any survived the cataclysm she wrought).

The only sign of Beldoran's lost kingdom that survives today are a few way markers crumbling in the wilderness, and the town of Glister.

Glister's battered walls and two squat, separate keep towers were built by Beldoran's men to guard the eastern reaches of his new-won land against the ogres who had fled into the mountains, and who constantly fought to return.

Dragons lair in the rugged mountains at the northeastern end of the Moonsea, and some few still cling to holds in the Dragonspine Mountains, where they are hunted for sport (and the lure of their hoarded wealth) by bored warriors from The Citadel of the Raven and nobles of Zhentil Keep.

To the east lie the Galena Mountains. In the Moonsea lands, these peaks are thought to be named for the legendary mage Ghaleen, who is said to have dwelt there long ago, but in other lands, other origins of the name are preferred.

Sailors call the eastern, uninhabited end of the Moonsea the Galenarr; it is pronounced "Gal-EEN-arh"). The rocky, treacherous coast of the Galenarr rises from the waves right up to mountainous heights. Only a few anchorages and vales break the wall of rock. Only outlaws, shipwreck victims, and adventurers come here, and few stay (or survive) long. Between Ironfang Keep and Glister, there are no proper mountain passes between the Moonsea North and lands to the east (Vaasa, Damara, and Impiltur), but there are several dangerous tracks, rock-climbing routes, and networks of tunnels made and inhabited by various subterranean dwellers.

Dragons are even rarer here than in the Dragonspines. Through the years, most have been slain by the evil creatures who scramble and tunnel through the mountains, or subdued and broken to be used as steeds or included in foul breeding experiments.

A few wyverns and lesser creatures lair in the peaks. The most numerous of this lesser life are the large, grey-brown, harmless fish-and carrion-eating seabirds known as "whistlecroaks" for their harsh calls.

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With Great Power

Constructing a Solo Campaign

by Dale A. Donovan

Let's look at a rare subgenre of role playing game adventures—the solo campaign.

Many RPGs, like the D&D® and AD&D® games, are designed to perform best when a group of characters work together toward a common goal. In games like these, each character has strengths and weaknesses; warriors fight, mages cast spells, rogues steal, etc. Each character performs his or her task well, but depends on others in the group to handle the duties he or she cannot. In a solo campaign, however, such a group is impossible. This presents a problem for the GM and solo player.

This difficulty can be overcome in super hero game campaigns—especially in games that allow players to custom build their heroic PCs with points (see POLYHEDRON® Newszine issues #72 and #75 for my Character Point system for the MARVEL SUPER HEROES game). Such a hero can be quite self sufficient in a solo campaign.

The Solo Hero

What does it take for a hero to make it on his or her own? Let's take a look at some of the characters I'll be referring to throughout this column. DC Comics' Superman and Green Lantern (I'll use Hal Jordan as my GL example) and Marvel Comics' Spider-Man and Quasar, are all very competent solo heroes. They have many things in common.

First, all four have some form of movement power—of the four only Spidey can't fly, but his webbing more than compensates in an urban environment. Second, each hero possesses super strength or some form of offensive, damage-causing power (Spidey's strength, Superman's strength and heat vision, and GL and Quasar's energy blasts). Third, each has a damage-avoiding or damage-reducing defensive power (Supes' tough skin, Spidey's speed and agility, and GL and Quasar's force fields). As you may have noticed, the abilities of GL and Quasar are quite similar. They both act as protectors of the universe (or part of it), and they both derive their abilities from an external power source. The reason I mention this is also to point out how heroes with similar powers can still be quite different in play. Remember this for your campaigns. This also applies to archenemies—foes of a hero with powers similar to his or her own—but more on archenemies later.

Other elements are common to many solo heroes. One is vast resources. DC Comics' Batman and Marvel Comics' Iron Man are both quite wealthy, and both use this wealth to aid them.

It also seems that if you're a solo hero, you must have a secret identity. Without a bunch of super-powered friends around to watch your back, it's imperative to keep your real identity a secret—at least from the general public and your foes.

A wide variety of skills and NPC contacts and allies can be terribly important in a solo game as well. Read Batman's write-up in any of the DC Heroes game products from Mayfair Games for a truly impressive list of skills and talents. Remember, super-strength can't solve every problem, even in a super hero's life. How many times has Batman called on Commissioner Gordon for information or back-up? How effective would Bats be if Gordon wasn't an ally, or was actively hostile to the hero? Thus, not only purchasing, but maintaining good relations with *someone* is important. Even the Punisher, who is considered a criminal by the law and a psycho by most heroes, has a support network. In the game, this translates as good role-playing. Your solo PC can't go around threatening or alienating *every* law-enforcement or authority figure, even if he or she is a psycho, because the hero will eventually need help from somebody.

As a player in the solo campaign, you must decide which of the above elements, and others, your solo hero will possess. As a GM, you must help the player make the decisions that will help the campaign be fun.

Running a Solo Game

Once the player has created his or her PC hero, the GM's hard work starts. The GM of a solo campaign has a difficult task; creating an exciting world built not around a fairly large group of characters with plenty of adventure possibilities and plot hooks, but around only one character and his or her life. The universe the GM creates must be challenging without wiping out the hero in his or her first escapade.

As you design your campaign setting and the adventures for your solo hero, keep in mind that in most cases there will not be any other characters around to bail out the PC hero. The GM must be prepared for the possibility of bad luck going against the hero in a battle or when searching for that all-important clue. A GM's margin of error in setting up scenarios for solo heroes is much finer than in other campaigns. If luck turns bad for the PC (especially in a fight), he or she may decide to cut his or her losses and make a strategic withdrawal. This may alter or ruin a GM's plans for the rest of the adventure. A fine balance must be maintained between a solo hero and the forces a GM throws against the hero. Proper foes of solo heroes tend to fall into one of three categories:

Large organizations: Like the Maggia families that Spider-Man has fought over the years, and Intergang that Superman was involved with not long ago. These large groups can provide long-term foes and goals for your solo hero. These groups' operations are so immense that the actions of a single individual, even a super-powered one, won't threaten to shut down the organization altogether. Not even Supes was able to stop all Intergang's forces and activities. Stopping such an organization completely can even become the primary focus of the campaign if both the player and the GM are willing to take it in that direction.

Archenemies: Batman and Spider-Man probably are the two heroes with the most colorful and the best known rogues' galleries, so I won't even bother listing the miscreants' names, but they serve as wonderful examples. One key to a good (i.e., evil) archenemy is equality. The archfiend should, in some way, be the equal of your hero. This can be in powers or power levels, resources, or

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Guarded Wagon

by Tom Prusa

This adventure is designed for the six pregenerated characters included in this issue. However, PCs from your own campaign also can be used; simply have them hired as guards by a caravan.

Players' Introduction

You are among the highest paid caravan guards in the world. Your business, the Company of the Guarded Wagon, has made quite a name for itself. You have yet to lose a caravan, which is a record very few can match.

Your current employer, Sadaloc Leatherkin, is a big burly merchant who tends to order you around. This doesn't sit well with you, but he pays your fees without a complaint. He wants to meet you outside of town tonight. His caravan is forming there for its journey from Balic to Gulg. The trip will be a long one, and through very nasty country. In other words, it will be just like all of your other jobs.

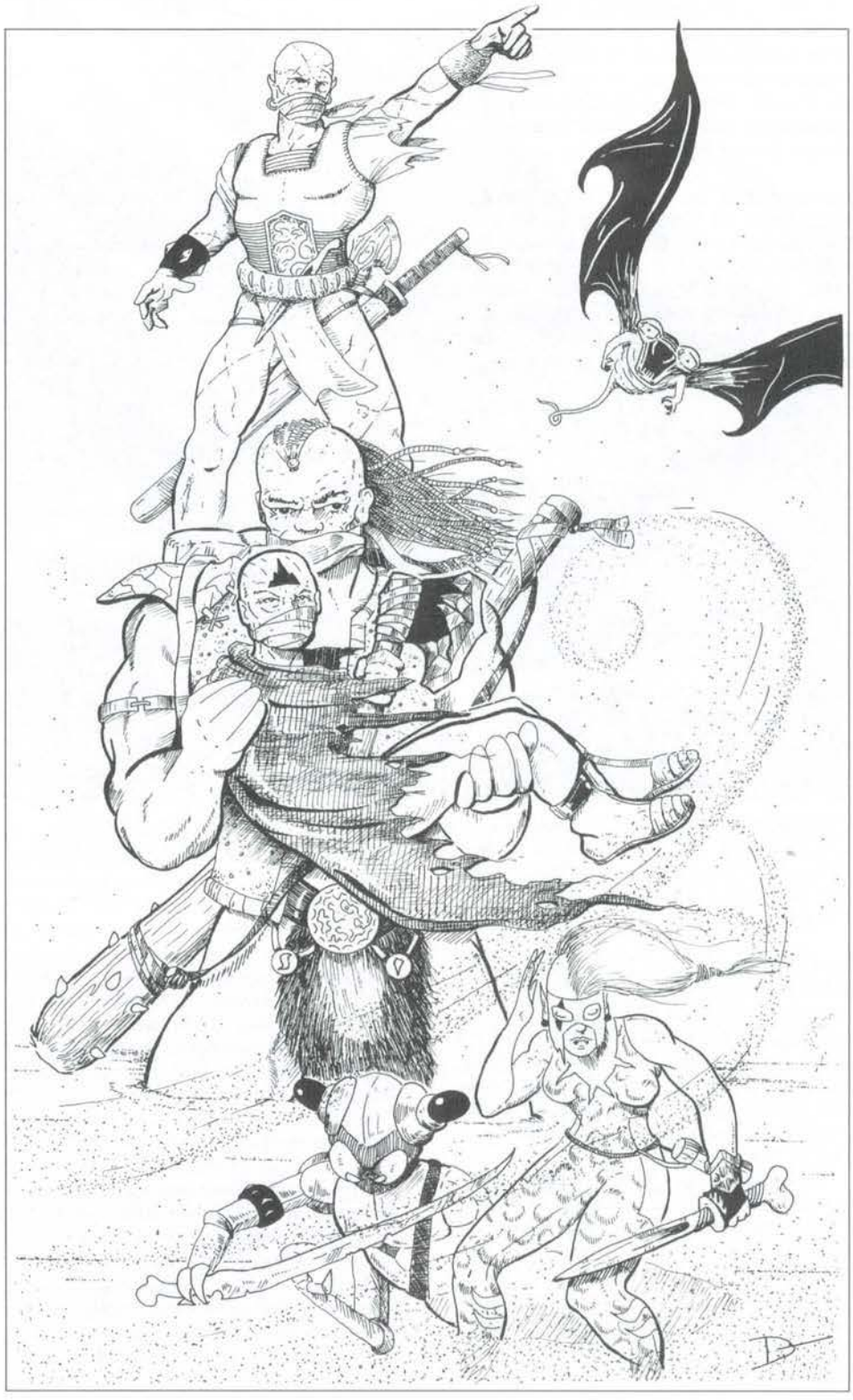
You are currently sitting in the Black Dog Bar, waiting for the sun to move from straight overhead. The temperature is around 105, but it's worse outside. The afternoon drags on, and finally the sun begins to set. As the temperature drops, activity returns to the streets. Knowing that it is near the appointed time, you set out for the gates of Balic.

Gate Guards

As you approach the gate, you see guards milling about and a man in fine silk robes giving orders to a group of crossbowmen. The archers run up the stairs and take positions on the ramparts while a pair of half-giants drag away two humans and a dwarf. The captive trio appears badly beaten and is likely headed to the slave pens.

The excitement dies down a bit, and the templars and guards resume watchful positions.

The PCs start about 100 feet from the gates. There is quite a bit of traffic in



this area, and there are a number of stables for kanks (large riding insects), imix (larger riding lizards), and mekillots (really large lizards that pull the caravan wagons).

There are 20 crossbowmen on the walls, and the gates are manned by three half-giants and five templars. The templars are not going to let the PCs out of town without a good reason and a substantial bribe. The chief templar is named Lactar Smid.

Lactar Smid: Int High; AL LE; AC 4; MV 12; HD 10 (Templar 10); hp 60; THAC0 14; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1 (bone short sword +2); SA spells; SD spells; SZ M; ML 18; XP 2,000 (500 for bribing)

Spells remaining: *Cure light wounds* x2, *cause light wounds, command, sanctuary, hold person* x2, *silence 15' radius, spiritual hammer, dispel magic, cause paralysis, speak with dead, cure serious wounds, cause serious wounds, poison, flame strike, true seeing*

Lesser templars (4): Int High; AL LE; AC 6; MV 12; HD 4 (Templar 4); hp 22 each; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6-1 (obsidian short swords); SA spells; SD spells; SZ M, ML 14; XP 420 each

Spells remaining: *Cure light wounds, cause light wounds, command* x2, *detect magic, aid, silence 15' radius, barkskin*

Half-giants (2): Int Average; AL LE (today); AC 4; MV 24; HD 5 (Fighter 5); hp 66, 98; THAC0 14; #AT 1; Dmg 1d10+6 (obsidian two-handed swords); SZ M; ML 12; XP 420 each

Crossbowmen (20): Int Average; AL LE; AC 8; MV 24; HD 3 (Fighter 3); hp 20 each; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4-1 (light crossbow bolts); SZ M; ML 10; XP 175 each

Lactar wants a bribe. He is willing to settle for 1 silver piece, but if the PCs ask him how much he wants, he demands a gold piece. If they fail to offer a bribe, he threatens them with prison or slavery, mentioning how the king needs new contestants for the arena. He is not really interested in arresting the PCs, just in getting a profit.

If the PCs make threats, Lactar waves his templars and half-giants into position. At this point, it will require at least a gold piece bribe to get the PCs out of this predicament.

If the PCs refuse to pay anything, Lactar orders the guards on the wall to aim their crossbows at the PCs, who he places under arrest. At this point, a bribe of more than a gold piece is necessary, or the PCs will be led off to the arena. If the PCs try to fight their way out of the gate, they must face the two half-giants, templars, and crossbowmen. Lactar retreats if there is combat, climbing up on the wall. From there he can cast *flame strike*, following it up with a *hold person* or two. The crossbowmen also fire at the PCs, but only for two rounds.

Terrible Tembo

Yesterday you made your way out of Balic and joined the caravan. It is a small caravan, with only one mekillot-drawn wagon that is 20 feet high, 45 feet long, and covered with bone spurs and heavy wooden slabs. The caravan master and the three drivers ride inside while you walk.

The first day's travel was uneventful, and now you are resting during the worst heat of the day. Those of you on watch are sitting in the shade of the wagon, listening to the snores of the drivers and your other companions. The wind is blowing briskly, and small bits of sand sting your faces. This will be another long, hot day.

The PCs are about to be attacked by a trio of tembo. Tembo are nasty creatures which attempt to sneak in close enough to leap on their unsuspecting victims. Since all of the drivers and the owner are sleeping under the wagon, only the PCs are obvious targets.

Unless a character specifies where he or she is sleeping, the resting PCs are presumed to be under the wagon. It is the only place for shade.

Tembo (3): Int High; AL CE; AC 4; MV 15; HD 4; hp 19, 20, 21; THAC0 15; #AT 5; Dmg 1-4/1-4/1-6/1-6/2-8; SA psionics, bite causes energy drain; SD psionics, 40% chance to dodge missiles; SZ M; ML 20; XP 975 each

Tembo have the psionic powers of *life drain, shadow form, displacement,* and *death field generation. They have power scores of 10 and 80 PSPs each.*

The tembo fight to the death and attempt to carry away any PCs or NPCs who are killed.

Dangerous Oasis

After two more days of traveling, you have finally reached the first oasis on the trek. It is little more than a waterhole. The caravan master tells you he expects to be here for a full day; it will take that long to get enough water to fill all of the barrels.

You have a day of rest, although you must continue to be watchful. The chance of an encounter at an oasis is much higher than anywhere else. After about four hours, just after dawn, a group of figures appears on the horizon. There are a little more than a dozen of them. Those on watch rouse the rest of the company, and you all watch them move closer to the oasis. As they get nearer you see that they are scrabs, lizard-like little men with pincers surrounding their mouths. You know scrabs have a real fondness for elf flesh.

As they approach the oasis they politely ask if they can have some water.

Sadaloc, the caravan master, has no objection; he has traded with scrabs before. However, he had more guards with him then, so he warns the PCs to be on watch every second. Sadaloc is glad there are no elves among the drivers. The scrabs are cordial (for scrabs), taking turns at the waterhole, asking the PCs about their weapons and armor, and getting into and under everything. The leader of the scrabs engages in an animated discussion with Sadaloc, who shakes his head. Then the leader of the scrabs approaches Jearalith and asks if the elf (he means Josie), is for sale. If the players are not using the pregenerated characters, the scrabs will select a PC at random.

The scrab leader offers to pay two metal weapons and a pretty rock he found for the character, who will be used for food. If he is turned down, he raises his offer to two metal weapons and four pretty rocks. He shows Jearalith the rocks (diamonds worth 100 gp each). If the scrab is turned down again, he makes veiled threats about uncooperative humans and what can happen to them.

Eventually the leader gives up and motions the rest of the scrabs to follow him away from the oasis.

After another three hours, during the hottest part of the day, the scrabs appear again. They have used their *chameleon power* to blend in with the sand and have approached to within 30 yards of the caravan. They attack, and the PCs suffer a −4 penalty to their surprise roll.

Scrabs (12): Int Average; AL CE; AC 4; MV 18; HD 5; hp 18 each; THAC0 15; #AT 2; Dmg 1-4/1-4 + grip; SA psionics; SD psionics; SZ M; ML 13; XP 650 each

Scrabs have the psionic powers of *animal affinity* (lizards), *biofeedback, chameleon power, enhanced strength, mind over body, contact, mindlink, conceal thoughts, inflict pain, thought shield, mind blank, psychic crush* and *mind thrust.* They have power scores of 13 and 61 PSPs each. In melee, the scrabs have a chance of gripping a limb with their pincers. On an unmodified roll of 18 or better, the scrab has grasped a limb. This means that it does damage automatically with the grasping claw, and has a +4 chance to hit with the other pincer. An open doors roll is required to break free, and that is the only action allowed for the round.

Scrab leaders (3): Int High; AL CE; AC 4; MV 18, Br 6; HD 7; hp 33, 28, 24; THAC0 13; #AT 2; Dmg 1-4/1-4 + grip; SA psionics; SD psionics, spells; SZ M; ML 13; XP 1,400 each

Scrabs have the psionic powers of *animal affinity* (lizards), *biofeedback, chameleon power, enhanced strength, mind over body, contact, mindlink, conceal thoughts, inflict pain, thought shield, mind blank, psychic crush* and *mind thrust.* They have power scores of 13 and 61 PSPs each.

The leaders are defilers of 7th level. This means that when they cast spells, up to a seven-yard ring around them turns gray and lifeless.

Spells memorized: *Burning pincers, chill touch, magic missile, protection from good, invisibility, scare, detect psionics, hold person, non-detection,* and *psionic dampener.*

The scrabs have a devious battle plan. All of the scrabs have used *enhanced strength,* and now have an effective Strength of 18. (+1 to hit, +2 to damage).

In the first round, eight scrabs close, one on each PC except Josie, who gets three attackers. The other four normal scrabs attempt to establish psionic contact with four of the PCs. These can be chosen at random. The three leaders begin their spell assault: one casts *detect psionics,* and the other two cast *magic missiles* at Sud and Maradoc.

In round two, The scrabs continue to melee. If any of the remaining four successfully made contact last round, they close and attempt to touch the affected PC and *inflict pain.* This requires a successful power check and a melee hit. The victim must make a saving throw vs. spells, or pass out from the pain. Such pain lasts 1-6 rounds. If the saving throw is successful, the PC is still −2 to hit and damage and suffers a −2 armor class penalty. Any scrabs that failed to make contact last round will try again. If a leader successfully detected psionics, he casts *psionic dampener.* If the targeted PC fails the saving throw, he or she cannot use psionic abilities. The remaining two scrab leaders cast *hold person* spells at Josie if she is still fighting, otherwise their spells will go wherever they will be most effective.

The attack continues in round three. If Josie is unconscious or held, three scrabs pick her up and head for the desert. Otherwise, they continue to concentrate on her. If Sud or Maradoc have finished off their opponents by now, the leaders begin to concentrate on them. The leader who still has his *magic missile* uses that on Sud, and the other two move to close with Maradoc.

In round four and beyond, the scrabs continue to try to get Josie as a prisoner. If they are successful, the scrabs attempt to break off melee and escape into the desert. If Josie is still fighting, the scrabs continue to try to make contact and use *inflict pain.* The leader that still has his *hold person* spell uses it on Josie, and the other two begin trying to make contact with anyone who is hurting them (probably Sud or Maradoc).

If the scrabs get away with Josie, the PCs are probably going to pursue. This will not be difficult, as most of the PCs are faster than the scrabs.

During their flight, the scrabs will cure Josie with crude *healing ointment.* This will keep her at 1 hit point and will permanently lower her Charisma by one. The ordeal has left Josie with no spells in memory.

If the PCs catch up to the scrabs, the creatures fight to the death for their food. However, the leader scrabs will flee to find prey another day. If it took the PCs more than four rounds to catch up with the scrabs, one of the leader scrabs was able to steal Josie's magic sword before escaping.

Metal Merchant

Sadaloc is very impressed by your resistance to the scrab attack. He orders his drivers to collect the shells from the dead scrabs, as they make good armor. You end up with half of the shells, which are worth one silver piece each.

As you finish cleaning up after the battle, another figure materializes on the horizon. This one is riding a kank, which leads another kank. The second kank is loaded down with bundles and bags.

Behind them rides a half-giant mounted on an imix. As the figures get closer you see that the lead rider is a half-elf. He waves at you as he approaches the oasis.

When the half-elf nears, the PCs can see he is richly dressed. His half-giant bodyguard is obviously wary and alert. The half-elf is Chlopeck Divot, a merchant, and his bodyguard is Fuddle. They are on their way to Balic from Gulg. The merchant is a dealer in metal, and as such is carrying very valuable cargo. No metal can be seen on the spare kank, although the half-giant is carrying two metal long swords, and the merchant has two metal daggers on him. There are several water barrels strapped to the imix and Fuddle's saddle.

"Well, well. A guarded wagon, it seems. And it looks as though you've had some trouble recently. Something fatal to a Templar, I hope?

Sadaloc lets the PCs deal with the half-elf; he doesn't want anyone too near his wagon.

The half-elf merchant is eager for news, wanting to know what kind of bribes he'll have to pay to get into Balic, can he share the water at the oasis, have the PCs seen any elves around, etc. He knows there have been reports of elven raiders near Gulg, but he and Fuddle didn't have any trouble. Of course, with Fuddle along, trouble doesn't usually come looking for him. The next oasis, three days ahead on the trail, was dry when he and Fuddle passed it. They are nearing the end of their water supply and were very glad to see this oasis. If they have to, they'll wait until tomorrow to fill up their barrels, they have enough water to last that long.

After chatting with the PCs for a while, Chlopeck gets down to business. He is a trader, and he smells an opportunity for a hefty profit. He has metal weapons for sale, and all he wants is a fair price. His prices are listed below.

- 10 metal-tipped arrows: 2 silver each
- Two short swords: 5 gold each
- One long sword: 10 gold
- Two daggers: 2 gold each
- One knife: 1 gold
- Two battle axes: 7 gold
- One two-handed sword: 12 gold
- One short sword: 10 gp

Chlopeck is not aware that one of the battle axes is magical— *+2*, and the single short sword is *+1, +2 vs. magic using creatures.*

Obviously, the PCs are not going to walk away loaded down with metal weapons, as they do not have enough money to purchase them all.

Chlopeck will not haggle. However, he will consider trading for permanent magic. For example, Greckle's only possessions that would get him a battle axe are his *ring of regeneration* or magical dagger. Take note if Greckle spends his caravan funds. Acquiring metal weapons is not part of his focus.

If the PCs decide to fight to get the weapons, Fuddle defends the goods, while Chlopeck disappears. Chlopeck will reappear, just after he drives both his daggers into a character's back. He will also try and soften any weapon doing serious damage to Fuddle. The PCs may be able to get all of the metal weapons this way, but they likely will have a few fatalities to show for it.

Chlopeck: Int High; AL N; AC 4; MV 24; HD 7 (Thief 7); hp 34; THAC0 17; #AT 2; Dmg 1-4 +2/1d4 +2 (steel daggers); SA backstab for 3× damage; SD *ring of invisibility*; SZ M; ML 12; XP 1,400 (250 for getting news of Gulg, and 250 for buying a weapon instead of fighting)

Chlopeck has the wild psionic talent of *soften.* His power score is 18, and he has 40 PSPs. On a successful power check, non-magical weapons lose one from their chance to hit and damage. When minuses reach 5, the affected weapon is rubbery and useless. Magic weapons get their owner's save vs. magic to avoid the effect.

Fuddle: Int Average; AL CN (today); AC 4; MV 18; HD 10 (Fighter 10); hp 228; THAC0 6; #AT 3; Dmg 1-8 +11/1-8 +11/1-8; SZ L; ML 12; XP 2,000

Fuddle is a long sword specialist. He uses a long sword in each hand, and has almost maximum hit points for his level, race, and Constitution. He is fiercely loyal to Chlopeck and is trying to become a merchant. Wild psionic talent: *mind bar.* His power score is 10, and he has 58 PSPs. A successful power check makes him 75% magic resistant to enchantment/charm magics, and immune to domination/possession.

Wanting A Wheel

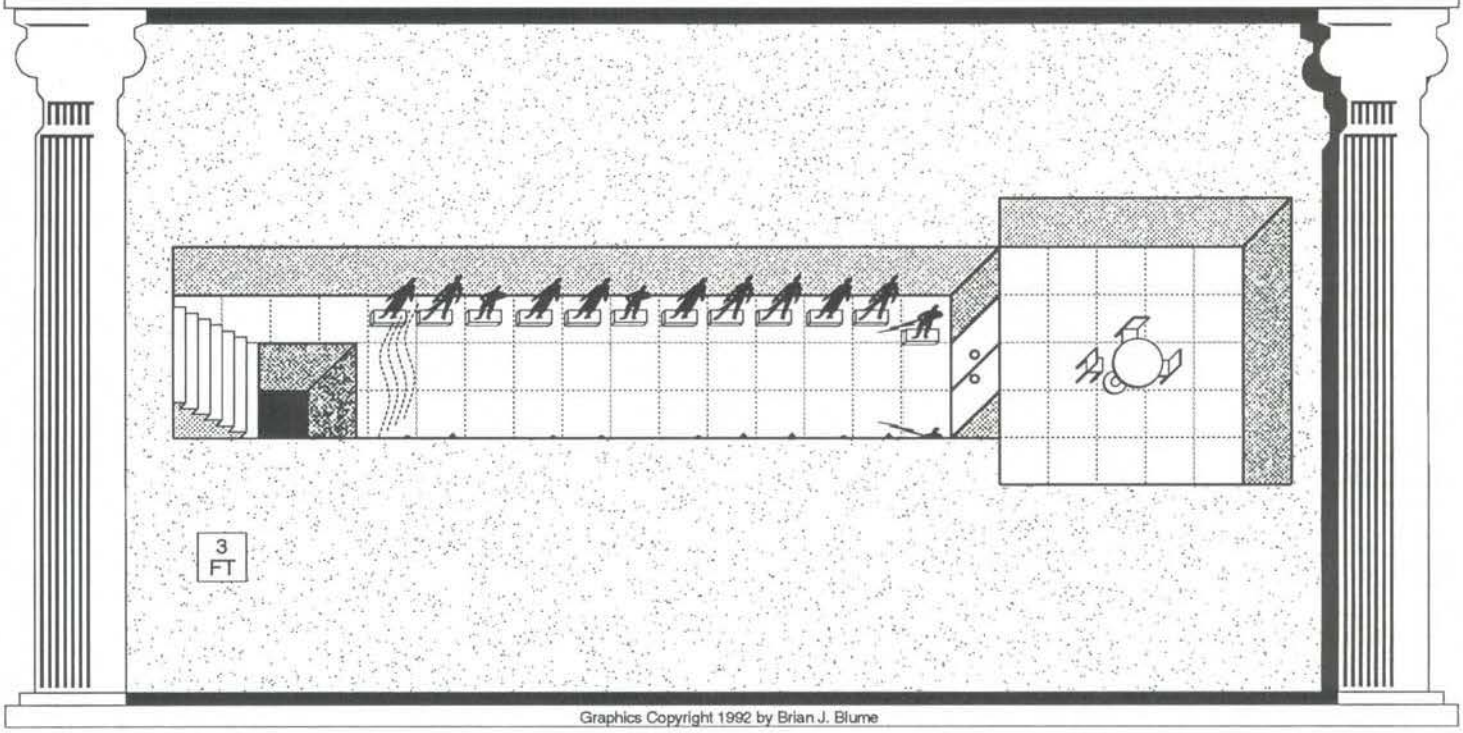
Yesterday you left the oasis, looking forward to making up some time. Now you are delayed again. An axle and wheel on the wagon broke this morning. Greckle and Sadaloc have been looking it over. Greckle is sure he can fashion another wheel, but you need some wood. There are dead trees near some ruins about half a mile away, but the ruins are across an estuary of the Sea of Silt. This could be a problem.

Sadaloc is not going to risk himself or his drivers trying to cross the silt. It is up to the PCs to get the wood. If they want to leave someone behind to watch the wagon, that is up to them.

The PCs have a challenge in front of them. They must cross 200 yards of silt. Silt is extremely grainy, and someone who goes under lasts no more than four rounds before suffocating. The PCs have a magic item that allows them to walk on the silt, (L'arin'ti's *ring of silt walking*), and Josie has a psionic talent that lets her walk on most surfaces, including silt. Sud can wade through the silt; it is only about 10 feet deep. Of course, if he loses his footing, he's in big trouble.

If Josie uses *body equilibrium,* she must make a power check and three Dexterity checks. The power check is to get her power going, the Dexterity checks are to keep her on course. If she fails her power check she knows she can't go, if she fails a Dexterity check a slight wind has blown her off course. Each failed Dexterity check means she must make another power check or lose her concentration, and sink into the silt. Sud and L'arin'ti can carry people across. Other options can work, based on the players' ingenuity.

UNDER THE RUINS OF NARWAL



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The Ruins of Narwal

Having negotiated the silt, you stand before a ruined building. There are several small dead trees in the area, but none big enough to provide the kind of wood you need for a wheel. One of them might make a decent axle, if it is cut and shaved smooth. The building's walls are still standing, but the doors and windows are all gone. It looks like the roof has caved in as well. From your position, you can see three window frames and a door frame. The door is blocked with rubble and broken stone. The windows are small, too small for Sud to enter. In fact, Maradoc and L'arin'ti would have quite a time squeezing through them.

Greckle must at least give directions on making the axle, and help measure it out. Anyone else who attempts it must make an ability check vs. one-half Wisdom. Failure means the axle is either too thick or too thin. If it is too thick, Greckle can save it. If it is too thin, the party must start over. There is only one more tree that could serve as an axle.

Nothing in sight looks like it would make a good wagon wheel. The PCs must enter the ruins and try to find wood or something that can serve as a wagon wheel. The PCs can climb in through the window frame or attempt to clear the rubble away from the doorway. The window frame does not pose any dangers, however Sud cannot make it through, and Maradoc and L'arin'ti must make successful Dexterity checks to enter.

It will take two rounds to clear the doorway. While they are clearing it, the door frame collapses, causing 2d6 points of damage to whoever is doing the work. Checking the structure or strength of the doorway allows a Wisdom check to see where it needs to be braced. A slab of stone lying nearby will make an adequate brace.

Inside the building, the PCs can poke around for a while. It takes four turns of searching before they find a set of stairs leading down.

The stairway is trapped and activates when the first PC sets foot on the steps. The stairs go flat like a sliding board, propelling that PC down into a pit. At the same time, all of the doors and windows in the building above are supposed to slam shut. Since there are no doors or windows, the walls collapse.

The PC who slides downstairs suffers 3d6 points of damage (Dexterity check for half damage), and lands in a small pile of dried out crystals which are the remnants of an acid pit. Everyone upstairs and inside the walls suffers 5d6 points of damage (save vs. breath weapon for half damage).

A *find traps* spell or Josie's find traps skill could locate the trap on the stairs. *Detect magic* reveals nothing, since the trap is mechanical. Greckle can also detect unsafe walls with a successful roll, and sliding/shifting walls (the stairs) with another successful roll.

Ancient Statues

Having reached the lower level of the ruins, you look around. You are in a long hallway lined with statues. The statues are dust covered, and it's hard to make out what they are supposed to look like in this dismal light. You can only see the first half dozen or so. The hallway stretches on, with more shadowy figures lining the walls. There is nothing in the immediate area that can be used for a wagon wheel.

Pause to let the PCs come up with a light source and make up a marching order. When they move on, the trap begins to take effect. There are 24 statues, all of ancient fighters, heroes, and sailors. The first pair of statues radiates faint magic. The third pair,

sixth pair, and 12th pair (final pair) also radiate magic. If the PCs *detect magic,* they learn that the first pair and sixth pair radiate alteration magic. The third pair and the 12th pair radiate enchantment/charm and evocation magic respectively.

At the end of the hallway is a door which hangs on one hinge. The last pair of statues stands on either side.

As the first person passes the sixth pair of statues, a magical trap is set off:

- The first pair of statues begins to glow, and a *wall of force* springs up between them.
- The third pair of statues begins to move. One arm of each statue reaches out and tries to grab any nearby PCs, holding them up in the path of the oncoming magical assault. The statues grab with a THAC0 of 16, and once they grasp a PC, a successful bend bars/lift gates roll is required to break free.
- The sixth pair of statues speak, via a *magic mouth.*

> "You must discover the key or lie here forever. The key is only a short. . . ." (Leave off speaking as though the message was interrupted.)

- The 12th pair of statues emit *lightning bolts,* which travel three feet above the ground for the length of the passage. The *lightning bolts* cause 8d6 points of damage. Anyone in the hallway must make a surprise roll and a saving throw vs. magic. Characters who are not surprised can save vs. spells for no damage (they jump out of the way) and do not take damage from the bolts. A failed saving throw means they suffer one-half damage. Surprised PCs take full damage, save vs. spell at −2 for half. PCs in a statue's grasp are considered surprised and cannot apply dexterity bonuses to the save.

After the first round, any PCs who state they are lying on the floor need not make saving throws. The *lightning bolts* are emitted each round, until the key is found. The key to the trap is the *magic mouth* message. The key is a short. The 12th pair of statues are covered by a thin sheet of copper, which is currently covered with dust. If someone brushes away the dust, and grounds the statues (using a metal item), the *lightning bolts* are harmlessly grounded, and the *wall of force* comes down. If only one of the statues is grounded, it stops one set of *lightning bolts* and half of the wall of force. If the PCs cannot figure out the key, they might opt for violence. If either of the 12th pair of statues is hit (AC 4) for 23 points of damage, it will be destroyed and the *lightning bolts* will stop. PCs cannot attack the statues while lying on the ground; there isn't enough leverage.

The doorway at the end of the hall is three feet wide and six feet tall. Inside is a square room, with an old wooden table and three ramshackle chairs. The table is not perfect for a wagon wheel, but with a little effort, it can be made to work. Of course, the PCs must figure out how to get the table top through the hallway, and across the silt.

Elves On The Warpath

> Having fixed the wagon wheel, you have been on the road again for three uneventful days. You have seen almost no signs of life, except for an occasional flying creature, far off in the distance. Yesterday Sadaloc claimed he saw an elf running parallel to the trail, but you haven't seen any sign of elves today. In only two days you will be in Gulg, collecting for another successful mission.
>
> Your thoughts wander until you spot the drivers pulling the wagon to a stop. They begin fastening all of the openings on the wagon. "Elves, ho!" they shout. In the distance you see a line of dust. Elven raiders!

Elves (40): Int High; AL N; AC 4; MV 36+; HD 3 (Fighter 3); hp 15 each; THAC0 16 or 17; #AT 2 or 1; Dmg 1d6-2/1d6-2 (obsidian tipped arrows) or 1d6 (bone short swords); SD psionic *levitation* (power score 10, PSPs 20 each); SZ M; ML 13; XP 420 each.

Elf subchiefs (3): Int High; AL N; AC 2; MV 36+; HD 5 (Fighter 5); hp 28 each; THAC0 11 or 14; #AT 2 or 1; Dmg 1d6/1d6 (metal tipped arrows) or 1d6+1 (bone short swords); SA psionic *life-draining* (power score 13, PSPs 41 each; transfers 1d6 hit points from victim to elf on a successful power score and hit); SD psionic *levitation* (power score 10); SZ M; ML 13; XP 975 each

Elf chieftain (1): Int Exceptional; AL N; AC 0; MV 36+; HD 7 (Fighter 7/Wizard 5); hp 34; THAC0 10 or 11; #AT 2 or 3/2; Dmg 1d6/1d6 (metal tipped arrows) or 1d8+3 (wood long sword +3); SA psionic *life detection* (power score 13, PSPs 63), spells; SD spells; SZ M; ML 13; XP 3,000

The chieftain is a preserver mage who has these spells in memory: *Chill touch, magic missile, charm person, detect magic, detect invisibility, detect psionics, Melf's acid arrow, spook, lightning bolt, Melf's minute meteors,* and *minor globe of invulnerability.*

The elves have a simple plan. They are going to kill everyone on the caravan and take all of the goods and water for themselves. They are not evil, this is just how they survive. If the PCs are willing to give up everything they own, and the wagon, too, the elves will let them go.

During the first two combat rounds the elves close, moving from about half a mile away to about 70 yards away. The PCs have this much time to prepare. The elves surround the wagon, at a distance of 70 yards, and begin to shower arrows on the wagon, and on the PCs and NPCs. Any PCs on top of the wagon can take partial cover (+4 bonus to AC), since the wooden slabs of the wagon extend up above the top of the wagon for about three feet.

Each elf can shoot two arrows a round. The elves keep moving and do not bunch together. The elves want to locate any spellcasters and concentrate the arrow fire on them.

The subchiefs aim at anyone on top of the wagon, while the chieftain casts *detect psionics* and *detect invisibility.* As soon as he can identify a spellcaster, the chieftain casts *magic missile* and *Melf's acid arrow* at that target. If the chieftain comes under fire, he casts his *minor globe of invulnerability* on the following round.

When the PC mages are down, the elves will rush the wagon. The subchiefs melee the most dangerous PCs, using their *life-draining* abilities as often as possible. The chieftain casts a *charm person* on one of the humans, or the half-elf. If the charm is successful, he tells the affected PC to drop everything and flee for his life. Next, the chieftain closes with his magical wooden sword, probably on the gladiator. He saves his *spook* spell for an emergency, and his *Melf's minute meteors* will be used to smoke out those inside of the wagon.

If more than 20 fighter elves are killed, or more than 15 and the subchiefs are killed, the remainder attempt to escape.

After dealing with the Elves, the PCs can finish their trip to Gulg and collect their payment. ❑

Maradoc Wilmot

8th Level Male Mul Gladiator

STR: 20
INT: 12
WIS: 11
DEX: 16
CON: 21
CHR: 10

AC Normal: 6
AC Rear: 8
Hit Points: 104
Alignment: Neutral
Languages: Common, Dwarvish, Elvish
THAC0: 13
Move: 24

Age: 30
Height: 6′ 4″
Weight: 245 lbs.
Hair/Eyes: None/Green

Weapon Proficiencies: All, specialized in: short sword, hand axe, bastard sword, short bow, flail
Nonweapon proficiencies: Blind-fighting, mining (11), healing (12)
Water Requirement: 1 gallon a day (½ gallon if in the shade)
Rest Requirement: Must sleep after every 46 hours of hard exertion, normal activities (including marching) require sleep every week or so
Magic Items: *Wooden bastard sword +2, leather bracers of fire resistance, potion of healing* (apple)
Equipment: Leather armor, two wooden hand axes, two bone daggers, belt pouch, One-gallon water bottle (full), 17 cp
Special Gladiator Abilities: Maximize armor (+1 bonus to AC), proficient in all weapons, multiple weapon specializations
Psionics (wild talent): *Flesh armor* (18)
Psionic Strength Points: 56

My face is a map of my past. Scars adorn almost every part of my body. The scars and the fact that I never did worry about washing helped to give me a fearsome look in the arena.

I was the best that there ever was, undefeated in the arena. Then again, most gladiators who aren't undefeated aren't still alive. Even in the fiercely competitive world of the arena, I stood out. I was ruthless, fierce, and fair. Fair in that anyone who ever raised a blade against me is now dead. I don't believe in mercy, someone who wants mercy had better show me mercy first. I have what some call a cynical view of the world, but I think it's practical. Anyone who doesn't

Sud

8th Level Male Half-giant Fighter

STR: 22
INT: 10
WIS: 10
DEX: 12
CON: 19
CHR: 10

AC Normal: 6
AC Rear: 6
Hit Points: 132
Alignment: Good (other half can change every morning)
Languages: Common, Dwarvish, Halfling
THAC0: 13
Move: 30

Age: 25
Height: 10′ 5″
Weight: 1,544 lbs.
Hair/Eyes: Brown/Blue

Weapon Proficiencies: Two-handed club (specialized) (dmg 3d6), trident, two-handed mace (dmg 2d6)
Nonweapon proficiencies: Blind-fighting, water find (8)
Water Requirement: 4 gallons a day (2 gallons if in the shade)
Rest Requirement: Normal
Magic Items: *Wooden two-handed club +3, leather vest of protection +1*
Equipment: Hide armor, two-handed wooden mace, obsidian long sword, belt pouch, 8-gallon waterskin (full), large leather shield, 5 cp, 3 bits
Special Abilities: 60′ infravision, flexible alignment
Psionics (wild talent): *Complete healing* (19)
Psionic Strength Points: 58

I am a big person with a friendly smile. I have vivid red scar on the left side of my face—that gaj had sharp claws.

Some people call me wishy-washy, but I just like to try new things. One day I'll feel like being a cleric, then I might try my hand at magic. Most of the time I imitate Maradoc, because he's the best fighter I ever saw. But if I get bored I'll try to be sneaky like Josie, or a be hunter like Larry. I get bored easily.

I once worked in Tyr. It was easy work: bashing heads, keeping the gladiators in line, and scaring the peasants. But I found I didn't like scaring peasants, and the gladiators didn't look like they were having a good time. Besides, I was getting really bored. I eventually decided to take off on my own. Some templars tried to stop me, so I bashed their heads in—that

Jearalith Rednap

9th Level Male Human Preserver Enchanter

STR: 10
INT: 19
WIS: 12
DEX: 17
CON: 16
CHR: 16

AC Normal: 6
AC Rear: 8
Hit Points: 41
Alignment: Neutral Good
Languages: Common, Elvish, Halfling, Thri-kreen
THAC0: 18
Move: 24

Age: 43
Height: 6′ 2″
Weight: 171 lbs.
Hair/Eyes: Black/Green

Weapon Proficiencies: Dagger, sling
Nonweapon proficiencies: Somatic concealment (19), heat protection (19), read/write Common (20), water find (19)
Water Requirement: 1 gallon a day (½ gallon if in the shade)
Rest Requirement: Normal
Magic Items: *Cloak of Protection +2, bone dagger +1, belt pouch of holding* (1,500 lbs., 250 cu. ft. capacity; this item and anything carried in it is invisible), *wand of magic missiles* (10 charges), *scroll* (*hold person, feeblemind, sleep,* and *knock* scribed at 10th level)
Spells/day: 4 3 3 2 1 plus one extra enchantment/charm per spell level
Equipment: Spell scrolls, 2-gallon waterskin (full), pint flask of strong brandy, 3 torches, fire building kit, 2 weeks' iron rations, pen and ink, 2 sheets of blank parchment, erdlu egg, 5 gp, 7 sp, 3 cp, 5 bits
Spell scrolls: Level One: *Charm person*, comprehend languages, detect magic, read magic, shocking grasp, sleep*, Tenser's floating disc, ventriloquism*; Level Two: *Blindness, detect evil, detect psionics†, Melf's acid arrow, ray of enfeeblement*, strength*; Level Three: *Dispel magic, flame arrow, haste, hold person*, suggestion**; Level Four: *Charm monster*, enchanted weapon*, psionic dampener†, polymorph other*; Level Five: *Cone of cold, feeblemind*, hold monster**

* enchantment/charm spell
† new spell from the *DARK SUN™ Rules Book*

Psionics (wild talent): *Biofeedback* (14)
Psionic Strength Points: 71

I am a dignified, suave man of the world. I try to look like someone who is used to being in charge. My carefully cultivated air of command really helps me deal with people.

My old master, Arsineus, taught me that there is only one path to the true Art. Anyone who does not practice magic in this way is a defiler, and an enemy. This view made Arsineus very unpopular with the local templars, and he spent most of his life in hiding. He was a father to me. I grew up in the streets of Tyr as a beggar, but Arsineus gave me pride and knowledge.

Because good wizards are persecuted, We have formed alliances to share safety and knowledge. Each alliance is a strict one, and anyone who betrays it will be hunted down and killed. I am very careful not to reveal my alliance connections in the different cities I visit. I generally go to the elven market, and look for elves selling herbs. I merely ask them if they have some mandrake root. If they do, I buy the root. Most of the time they laugh, but if they ask if a pinch of sand mother ichor would do, it means that they are my contacts to the Veiled Alliance in the city.

I can pass messages to many cities along the caravan routes. This is the chief reason I helped start this company. We call it the Company of the Guarded Wagon. The group includes:

Sud: This half-giant has a good heart. His head is a bit empty, and he frequently tries to imitate my spellcasting motions. I caution him not to do it when others can see.

Greckle of the Mountain: A dwarven priest of the earth. He can summon a wall of stone in almost no time at all. Pretty impressive.

Josie Mendicant: This half-elf is also a servant of the alliance. Being a half-elf, she has an inferiority complex as big as Sud. I have to watch her, especially around elves. Other than that, she's someone I could get interested in.

Maradoc Wilmot: A gladiator, and the backbone of our company. When I first met him, I charmed him. This might have had bad consequences, but I really like the guy and he seems to like me, too. The charm should have worn off years ago, so it must be true friendship.

L'arin'ti: This mantis warrior is a wilderness expert. She rounds out the company. Her hunting and survival skills have helped out many a time. She's also no slouch in combat.

was something different.

I traveled a bit and met Greckle. He didn't like me at first, and doesn't like me much now. But I helped him out in a battle with a few dozen templars and guards, and now he lets me follow him around. He joined some mages and a gladiator, and we have formed our own company to guard caravans.

Caravans are neat, they carry lots of stuff, travel to new places, and always have enough water. Well, almost always. Maradoc, the gladiator, says my size makes an imposing threat to scare away any bad guys who might want to hurt the caravan. That sounds good, but we still seem to fight every trip. Maybe I need to practice being imposing.

The others in the Company of the Guarded Wagon include:

Jearalith Rednap: The smartest man in the world. I know that because he told me so. He can do magic, but he doesn't like me to talk about it. He says that it would get him in trouble. I try to do magic, and it never gets me in trouble. Of course, it never works, either. I like Jearalith a whole lot. I don't talk about his magic in front of anyone who's not in the company. It's fun to imitate him, because he's likable and a good talker.

Josie Mendicant: A real pretty elf, or human, or something. Like me, she can't seem to decide what she wants to be. One minute she's imitating a human, and the next minute she's running like an elf. She sometimes casts nasty magic spells, and then turns around and hides in the shadows. I wish I could imitate people as well as she can.

Greckle of the Mountain: This straight-laced dwarf is a perfect person to imitate. He never changes, so once I get it down I can always be like him. He can make a wall of stone appear from nowhere. I'm going to learn to do that.

L'arin'ti: Larry is a nifty golden bug. She knows a lot about the wilderness. I've tried to get her to teach me everything she knows about the wilderness, but she doesn't have the patience for it. She never seems to sleep. I have tried to imitate that part of her. The trouble is, after two or three nights of watching her, I drift off to sleep.

Maradoc Wilmot: This mul is such a good fighter it almost scares me. He's my favorite person to imitate. I can drive him crazy by echoing everything he says. I don't do it to bother him, just to learn how to be like him. Once I've learned all he knows, I might just go be king of the gladiators myself.

like it can meet me on the field of battle, or preferably, in the arena.

Only one person ever helped me. Arsineus, a powerful white mage, once bet a whole bunch of magic items on me. He claimed I could beat three nasty monsters at the same time. He was right, although I came away from that fight with a few more scars for my collection. After I won, Arsineus bought me (he had to pay ***ten*** gold pieces), and gave me my freedom. He died shortly afterward, but I have continued to travel with his apprentices. I have formed my own caravan guarding team. It's hot, dusty, thirsty work, fraught with death and mayhem every step of the way. Ah! Even more than the arena, I love this life.

The others in the Company of the Guarded Wagon are:

Sud: A half-giant, few can beat him for sheer strength or stamina. He can take blows that would fell anyone other than me. But he is not very smart, and he tends to imitate those around him. No matter who it is. He even spent a week trying to be a dwarf.

Josie Mendicant: A preserver mage. I didn't always trust magic, but that was before Arsineus. Now I know some mages can use magic without hurting the land as the sorcerer-kings do. Josie is a half-elf, which means she's sneaky. But she does her work, and she never risks using her magic when it might cause trouble. A fine friend.

Jearalith Rednap: Another preserver. I have always liked Jearalith. He just has a way about him. He was Arsineus' chief apprentice, and when Arsineus died Jearalith took over for him. He has said that he has other missions besides guarding caravans, but he's never said just what. It's amazing, we can meet a hostile enemy force, and all of a sudden the leader is laughing it up with Jearalith like they were long-lost brothers. What a charisma.

Greckle of the Mountain: Greckle is a dwarven priest of earth and a real strait-laced type. He is extremely conscientious about the caravans we guard. He has sat up many a night, keeping watch with me. It's okay for me, I only need to sleep every few days. But he's only a dwarf. I have to admire his steadfastness.

L'arin'ti: A thri-kreen ranger. L'ari, as I call her, is a very knowledgeable bug. She knows so much about the wilderness. She is always hunting, and frequently shares her bounty with the rest of us. She never sleeps, so on the rare occasions when I do, there still is someone trustworthy on watch.

Greckle of the Mountain

8th Level Male Dwarven Priest of Earth

STR: 13
INT: 12
WIS: 19
DEX: 14
CON: 16
CHR: 10

AC Normal: 7
AC Rear: 7
Hit Points: 47
Alignment: Lawful Neutral
Languages: Common, Dwarvish
THAC0: 16
Move: 12

Age: 94
Height: 5' 3"
Weight: 207 lbs.
Hair/Eyes: Brown/Black

Weapon Proficiencies: Lasso, dagger, battle axe, mace
Nonweapon proficiencies: Wagon driving (12), rope use (14), appraisal (19), survival-mountains (12)
Water Requirement: 1 gallon a day (½ gallon if in the shade)
Rest Requirement: Normal
Magic Items: *Steel dagger +2, two potions of healing* (mangoes), *wooden ring of regeneration, scroll (raise dead, cure light wounds, hold person, and barkskin* scribed at 12th level), scroll (*flame strike, create water, cause serious wounds, and light* scribed at 12th level)
Spells/day: 6 5 4 4
Equipment: Mekillot hide armor, obsidian battle axe, brown cloak, set of dirt-stained clothes, belt pouch, half-gallon water bottle (full), 25-foot silk lasso, wooden dagger, four bits, savings for focus (12 gp, 5 sp, 10 cp)
Special Dwarf Abilities: 60-foot infravision, +4 to saves against magic or poison, +1 bonus to saving throws and +2 bonus to proficiency checks related to focus (personally owning a caravan company)
Psionics (wild talent): *Catfall* (12)
Psionic Strength Points: 28

As a priest of the earth, Greckle can use any weapon made of metal, stone, or wood; can ignore the presence of earth for up to eight rounds a day, can gate in two cubic feet of earth (range 50 feet, dirt or stone only) once a day, and can turn undead. Greckle has major access to the sphere of Earth and minor access to the sphere of Cosmos.

I decided years ago that I wanted to run

L'arin'ti

7th Level Female Thri-kreen Ranger

STR: 16
INT: 10
WIS: 15
DEX: 21
CON: 14
CHR: 10

AC Normal: 0
AC Rear: 5
Hit Points: 53
Alignment: Neutral Good
Languages: Common, Thri-kreen
THAC0: 14
Move: 36

Age: 12
Height: 6' 4" (9' 1" long)
Weight: 452 lbs.
Exoskeleton/Eyes: Sandy Yellow/Jet Black

Weapon Proficiencies: Chatkcha, scimitar, short sword, long bow, dagger, club
Nonweapon proficiencies: Water find (14), survival-stony barrens (9), hunting (17), chatkcha making (14), tracking (17), heat protection (7)
Water Requirement: 1 gallon a week (½ gallon if in the shade)
Rest Requirement: None
Magic Items: *Obsidian ring of silt walking* (similar to a *ring of water walking* except it only works on silt), two *potions of invisibility* (grapes), *bone dagger +1, bone scimitar +2*
Equipment: Leather harness, two bone skinning knives, wooden club, long bow, quiver with 20 bone-tipped sheaf arrows, 10 chatkchas, belt pouch, one-quart water bottle (full), two leather wristbands each studded with a 2 gp gem, 2 cp
Special Abilities: Ranger: Fight with two weapons at no penalty, influence animals (save vs. rods at −2 negates, HS 43%, MS 55%, +4 "to hit" vs. elves; Thri-kreen: Bite once a round for 1d4 points of damage and paralyzation (save vs. poison negates, onset time varies with size of victim), leap 20' straight up or 50' horizontally, chatkcha returns it if misses the target, dodge missiles (9)
Psionics (wild talent): *Mind bar* (8)
Psionic Strength Points: 41

I was a little different from the rest of my pack; I was a bit of a loner who sometimes liked the company of humans. I liked to hunt and enjoy the stark beauty of the wilderness. I set out to prove I could exist on my own. Prove it I did, by

Josie Mendicant

7th/8th Level Female Half-elf Preserver/Thief

STR: 13
INT: 16
WIS: 10
DEX: 20
CON: 12
CHR: 15

AC Normal: 3
AC Rear: 8
Hit Points: 25
Alignment: Chaotic Good
Languages: Common, Elvish, Thri-kreen
THAC0: 17
Move: 24

Age: 37
Height: 6' 2"
Weight: 170 lbs.
Hair/Eyes: Brown/Blue

Weapon Proficiencies: Long sword, short sword, knife, short bow, sling
Nonweapon proficiencies: Somatic concealment (16), heat protection (12), read/write Common (17), blind-fighting, armor optimization (19), appraisal (×2) (13), survival-sandy wastes (14), water find (14)
Water Requirement: 1 gallon a day (½ gallon if in the shade)
Rest Requirement: Normal
Magic Items: *Bone short sword +1, +2 vs. magic using or enchanted creatures, bone dagger +1, three potions of rainbow hues* (cherries), *potion of feather falling* (apricot), *electrum ring of protection +1, scroll* (*magic missile, web, detect invisibility,* and *improved invisibility* scribed at 9th level)
Spells/day: 4 3 2 1
Equipment: Spell scrolls, one-gallon waterskin (full), three wooden throwing knives, bone lock picks, sling with 20 stones, leather boots with hollow heels, mekillot hide armor, two 1 gp gems (in right boot heel), spare bone lock picks (in left boot heel), 13 cp, 5 bits
Special Half-elf Abilities: 60-foot infravision. 30% resistance to sleep and charm spells, 1-in-6 chance to spot secret or concealed doors within 10', if actively searching spot secret doors 2-in-6 and concealed door 3-in-6

Thief Abilities

PP	OL	FT	MS	HS	DN	CW	RL	BS
48	77	76	84	94	41	67	30	×3

Spell scrolls: Level One: *Burning hands, comprehend languages, detect magic, read magic, spider climb, taunt, ventriloquism*; Level Two: *Blur, detect evil, detect*

psionics†, Melf's acid arrow, invisibility; Level Three: *Dispel magic, lightning bolt, slow, tongues, vampiric touch;* Level Four: *Fire charm, psionic dampener†, polymorph other*
† spell from the *DARK SUN™ Rules Book*
Psionics (wild talent): *Body equilibrium* (9)
Psionic Strength Points: 38

I am a half-elf. I had a hard upbringing; shunned by elves and distrusted by humans, thieving was the only way to survive. My life changed when I met a human called Arsineus, a wise and powerful man. He taught me the ways of the Veiled Alliance, and how to use magic without hurting the land.

For several years, I felt accepted. Then Arsineus was killed by templars, and his other apprentice and I escaped. We traveled around for a while, and eventually formed our own caravan-guarding company. We have a very well balanced company and have fought off numerous monsters and bandits.

The group includes:

Sud: A friendly half-giant who tries to imitate everyone. It's fine for him to try to be more like the gladiator, Maradoc, he's suited to that. But when he tried to follow me as I was moving silently, it was a disaster.

Maradoc Wilmot: This mul is the best fighter in the company. He fought in the arena for years and never lost. He is an incredible fighter, and very touchy.

Jearalith Rednap: The leader of the company, and my fellow apprentice under Arsineus. He knows a bit more about magic than I do, but I'll catch up to him before long, and he can't match my stealth skills. He is very likable, but I know that most of that comes from his specializing in enchantment/charm magics.

Greckle of the Mountain: A dwarven priest of earth. The company would have rather had a priest of water, but so would everybody. Since he has taken guarding caravans as his focus, a more dependable guard will never be found.

L'arin'ti: A thri-kreen ranger. L'ari is a bit touchy about elves. She is even touchier about thieves. She is always watching me. She never sleeps, and when I wake up and see those eyes staring at me, it definitely makes me nervous.

living alone for three years. When I returned home I discovered my pack had been wiped out by elven raiders.

I am currently allied with a mixed group of races, and find that the variety gives me an interesting feeling. It's almost like they're my nestmates. I would die to defend these people.

Our group is called the Company of the Guarded Wagon. When I met them, the leader had a very persuasive way about him. He convinced me that joining would allow me to have company, yet roam the wilderness. It has.

We have traveled a lot, going from city to city. I'm happiest when we're on the trail, but the cities are full of interesting things. I enjoy the elven markets, where questions are seldom asked. I have a hard time liking elves, and elves don't particularly like thri-kreen. I walk around, waiting to be challenged. Sure enough, some young elven fighter will try and make a name for himself by taking down a thri-kreen. I don't ever start fights, that would be wrong. But nobody says I can't defend myself. The strangest thing is that doing this has actually gotten me a few elven friends. When I am approached as a friend, I respond like one. It makes me wonder if it's right to go looking for fights with elves. But then I meet a gang of elven cutthroats on the trail, and my doubts are stilled.

The rest of the company includes:

Josie Mendicant: A half-elf, a mage, and a thief. Talk about having three marks against you! She seems friendly and eager to prove herself. I have decided to give her a chance. She's had plenty of opportunities, and never touched one thing of mine. Maybe she is okay.

Greckle of the Mountain: A dwarf and something of a bore. He's interested in my stories about the wilderness, and is always asking how to survive in the wilds. But when I tell him about hunting, he falls asleep. What a thickhead!

Maradoc Wilmot: A mul gladiator with a reputation and a chip on his shoulder. He's a tremendous fighter, and he has a tremendous temper.

Sud: A half-giant who often tries to imitate Maradoc. That's better than when he tries to imitate Josie, or me, or Greckle. He's friendly and likable, but he just can't make up his mind what to do.

Jearalith Rednap: The leader of the Company of the Guarded Wagon, and a mage. He's a preserver, not a defiler, but mages have always made me nervous. However, Jearalith only makes me nervous when he's actually casting spells. Otherwise, he's a great friend.

my own caravan company. This is my focus, and I'm going to make it happen. It's taken 25 years, but I have almost half the money I need saved up. I am currently with a company that guards caravans. It makes sense, I'll need to know how to protect my own company. I make safely delivering each caravan to its destination a minor focus.

Dwarves must have a focus to exist. Dwarves who break their focus are doomed to spending eternity as banshees, wailing over the sands. That'll never happen to me.

I am interested in anything that can help me make a successful caravan company. I need to know about the animals, the terrain, the trade routes, the monsters, everything. I'm getting a good look at the monsters, most of them face to face. The worst are those elven bandits, they're so fast. But none has ever taken a caravan from us, and none ever will. I still need to learn how to make and mend harnesses, how to survive in the desert, and how to deal with the merchant houses. I already know how to drive wagons, how to make wagons, how to appraise goods, and how to defend the caravan. It's all coming into focus, to use a dwarven expression.

The rest of the company includes:

Sud: My big, dumb half-giant buddy. Every time I create a wall of stone, he tries to. He can never understand why he can't do it. I've tried to tell him, but he just doesn't understand. If I made educating him my focus, I'd end up a banshee for sure.

Maradoc Wilmot: A mul gladiator. He is half dwarven, that's in his favor. Of course he's also half human, but nobody's perfect. He is an incredible fighter and has single-handedly slain some terrible monsters. He's a trusted friend, although he's entirely too quick to draw a weapon.

Jearalith Rednap: A preserver mage who can use magic without ripping the life from the land. He's very likable. The way he convinced me that magic could help me reach my focus was amazing.

L'arin'ti: A thri-kreen ranger. I listen when she talks about how to survive in the wilderness, but I get bored real fast when she talks about past hunts. Unfortunately, past hunts are her favorite subject.

Josie Mendicant: A preserver mage and a thief. I know I have to watch this one, she might steal from a caravan. I haven't caught her doing it yet, but if I do she's history.

Conashellae by Katherine York

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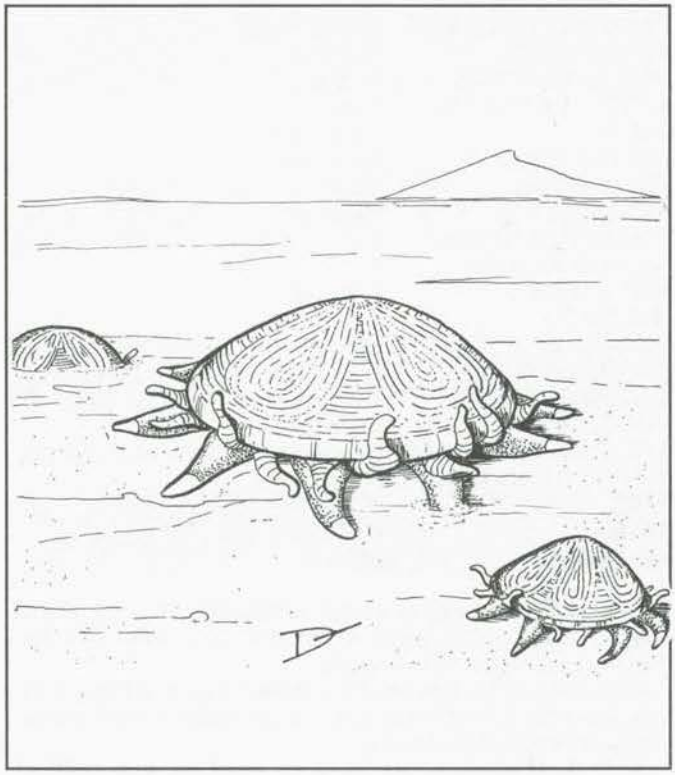
CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Sand or silt wastes
FREQUENCY:	Common
ORGANIZATION:	Family (schools)
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Day
DIET:	Plants/minerals
INTELLIGENCE:	Animal (1)
TREASURE:	None
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral
NO. APPEARING:	2-24
ARMOR CLASS:	8
MOVEMENT:	2, Br 12
HIT DICE:	1
THAC0:	20
NO. OF ATTACKS:	4
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-2/1-2/1-2/1-6
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Secretion
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	See below
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	T (less than 2')
MORALE:	Unreliable (2)
XP VALUE:	10



Conashellae, or shell-diggers as they are frequently called, are an especially hardy strain of shellfish usually found in the sandy wastes and silt seas of Athas. They range in size from 3″ to 15″ in length, and all have the same seashell carapace covering their bodies. Only their undersides have vulnerable, exposed flesh, similar to turtles and other shelled creatures.

The only other visible feature on the conashellae are two rows of pseudopods on the creature's front. The top row are soft and highly dexterous; these serve as sensory organs. The lower row have the same soft appearance, but they are pointed and bone-hard. These are used to burrow through the sand and silt and generally to provide locomotion.

Combat: Conashellae are timid creatures, preferring to flee rather than fight. They will do their best to avoid or escape any threat, but if they are cornered, they can defend themselves. The lower row of pseudopods are capable of grasping and pinching, like a crab's claws, each pod inflicting 1d2 points of damage per round it remains attached to the victim. The ends of the pseudopods come to a point, and also can be used to strike at probing hands, doing 1d2 points of damage per hit. Treat the pseudopods as AC 7 because they are muscular and difficult to grasp.

The manner in which the conashellae break down their food also may be used as a defense. A sac, located at the base of the pseudopods secretes a substance that has a high content of salt and is mildly corrosive. The liquid is normally used to break down the plants and minerals into a pulpy mass so they can be consumed. However, the liquid causes 1d6 points of damage to exposed skin—double damage if the liquid comes into contact with broken skin.

Habitat/Society: Conashellae are burrowing creatures, protected from the harsh environment by never going above the surface of the land. Their diet consists primarily of plankton, salt, and water. They feed by burrowing into and around a source of minerals or plants, secreting their digestive juices, then absorbing the pulpy mass slowly through pores in their undersides.

Like other varieties of shellfish, the conashellae can be found in small groups or schools, burrowing continuously. During the daylight hours, they are never seen closer than 8″ to 12″ below the surface in sand, and never closer than 6″ from the surface in silt. At night, however, the conashellae rest just below the surface, about 1″ to 2″ deep.

Conashellae spawn in spring and late fall, each female producing between one and three dozen eggs. The eggs are buried in the soil of their hunting grounds, about 5″ deep. It is not known why the eggs are never accidentally eaten during feeding hours. However, the rancid odor they produce when uncovered prior to hatching may be part of the reason.

Hatchlings appear three weeks after the eggs are laid, and the young begin feeding immediately. The growth rate of the creatures is unknown, but the fact that mature conashellae vary in size suggests they grow in proportion to the amount of minerals and plants they consume.

Ecology: Conashellae do not deplete the sand and silt of minerals. Their digestive process breaks minerals into base components, expelling the leftovers. This by-product is a liquid concentrate that doubles the mineral content in its wake.

The conashellae is a viable food source. Its flesh can be boiled and eaten, and the juices inside the creature can be used as a water substitute. The juice from one conashellae represents one-third of the normal water requirement for humans and demi-humans; one-eighth the water requirement for half-giants. The juices and flesh also abate some of the effects of dehydration, replenishing the body minerals lost through sweat and exertion.

The carapace of the conashellae are prized by some tribes, such as the feral halflings. The shells are used as ornaments, household items, and tools. Some of the renegade slave tribes have utilized the shells as weapons, honing the whorls and edges to a slicing sharpness. When thrown, these shell weapons do similar damage to the thri-kreen's chatkcha. If used as a hand-held weapon, the shell strikes like an obsidian dagger.

Sable Sandcrawler by Milton McGorrill

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CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Desert/rough
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Night
DIET:	Carnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Semi-(2-4)
TREASURE:	None
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	9
MOVEMENT:	6, Br 12
HIT DICE:	2
THAC0:	19
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	See below
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Immune to extreme heat and fire
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	T (18" long)
MORALE:	Unreliable (2)
XP VALUE:	250

The sable sandcrawler is a large caterpillar, 12 to 18 inches long, six inches high, and covered with long, soft black fur. The fur is pleasant to the touch.

The sandcrawler has 20 short stubby legs and large, bulbous eyes. Its friendliness and beauty make it very attractive to unwary adventurers.

Sable sandcrawlers are lured to the heat and light of campfires. The sandcrawler quickly approach parties sitting about the fire, chittering shyly and scampering near the flames. The creature will nibble daintily on any offered crumbs, and is quick to allow people to pet it.

The aim of the sandcrawler is to snuggle up next to someone, appearing to fall asleep. A few moments later, the sandcrawler will arise and scamper off into the night.

Combat: The sandcrawler is a passive creature and will attack only when angered or backed into a corner. Its small mandibles can inflict only one hit point of damage per bite.

The principle damage administered by a sandcrawler is through its method of reproduction. The sable sandcrawler must plant its egg in a living mammal host, upon which the developing larva will feed. The sandcrawlers prefer humanoid hosts.

If the sable sandcrawler discovers an adventurer who will let it lie against his bare skin, the sandcrawler will secrete a skin-numbing liquid from glands in its belly. This renders a patch of skin completely numb within one minute. The creature then deposits its single egg just under the skin of the host through a needlelike ovipositor. Depositing the egg takes five minutes. If the creature is disturbed before the five minutes have elapsed, no egg has been laid. However, if the creature successfully deposits an egg, it leaves, its work finished.

The larva grows under the adventurer's skin for about four days, sapping one point of Constitution from the host each day. There is a cumulative 10% chance each day that a raised red welt over the growing larva will be discovered.

The growing larva only can be removed by cutting it out, with the host suffering six points of damage from the process. The larva will die upon contact with air.

If the larva is not detected and removed, the welt bursts at the end of the fourth day, and a tiny sable sandcrawler drops off into the sand, burrowing deeply and disappearing almost immediately. The birth process causes the host body to suffer 2d6 points of damage. In addition, the host must make a successful save versus paralyzation or pass out from the pain for 1d4 hours. Lost constitution can be restored by a *heal* spell or one day of complete rest per lost point.

Habitat: Native to Athas, the sable sandcrawler is a solitary creature, burrowing under the sand to sleep during the day and wandering the surface only at night to hunt for food and search for water in the form of dew. The luxurious black fur of the sandcrawler is composed of tiny hollow tubes which draw the dew into the creature's body. The creature eats primarily small insects and baby reptiles.

The only real danger from the creature is in its method of reproduction (see combat section). If humanoid hosts cannot be found, sandcrawlers are forced to settle for animals. Animals are attracted to the sandcrawler when it releases small amounts of water from its fur when it is licked. When the animals are lulled into a false sense of security by licking the creature, the sandcrawler deposits an egg.

Ecology: The flesh of a sandcrawler is inedible. The fine fur of the creature, however, is prized by the halfling races who find its insulating properties useful. Some halflings have managed to extract an analgesic toxin from the creature and use it on their darts to induce sleep.

Sand Worm by James B. Alan

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CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Sandy wastes and silt seas
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Carnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Semi-(2-4)
TREASURE:	Q, S, V
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	0
MOVEMENT:	20, Br 10
HIT DICE:	20-100
THAC0:	5
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	10-40 (10d4)
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	See below
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	See below
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	G (100'-500' long
MORALE:	Fearless (19)
XP VALUE:	20,000 add 1,000/HD above 20)

Sand worms are immense and powerful creatures that burrow under the sandy wastes. The creatures range in color from tan, which makes them difficult to spot at a distance against the sand, to golden brown. All sand worms have thick, segmented hide plates that run along the length of their bodies. At the front of the creature, a triangular, plated maw opens to reveal a triple row of jagged teeth.

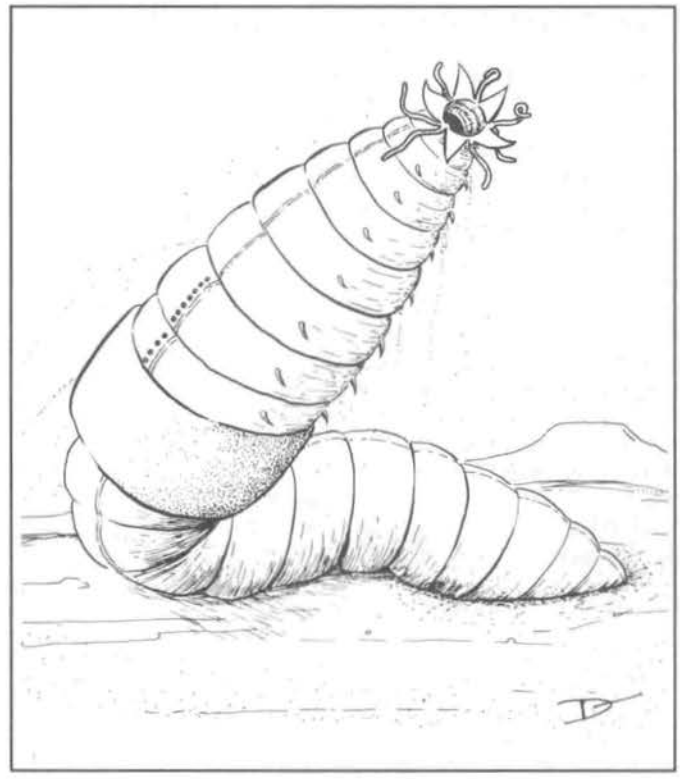
The most fearsome aspect of a sand worm is its size, ranging from 100′ to 500′ in length. The creatures have 1 hit die for every 5′ of length. They range in diameter from 20′ to 40′, and they weigh as much as 100 tons.

Combat: Sand worms sense their prey by vibrations in the sand or silt. The amount of vibrations indicates the size of a potential meal or how many creatures are walking to their doom. The worms are so in-tune with their environment that they can sense vibrations up to one mile away. Worms above ground can sense prey up to one-half mile away.

Just before a sand worm attacks, the sand or silt will be seen to shift like a ripple in a pool of water. The great beasts move so silently that there is no other indication of their passing. The worm erupts two rounds after the ground shifts, and it shoots straight up into the air, leaving its tail anchored in the sand or silt. The worm then crashes down upon its victims, causing 10d4 points of damage. The sand worm bites any remaining victims. Its maw delivers 10d4 points of damage. Any to-hit roll made with its bite attack that exceeds the required number to hit a victim's AC by 4 or more indicates the victim has been swallowed whole. Sand worms can devour creatures that are up to 18′ tall and 12′ wide. Swallowed creatures suffer 4d4 points of damage per round while inside a worm. The creatures are considered digested after 20 minutes, making it impossible to raise them.

Anyone inside a sand worm can attempt to escape by cutting his way out. The interior of a sand worm is treated as AC 7. A trapped creature must inflict 50 points of damage to the worm before an opening has been cut to allow escape.

The worms are terrible foes, immune to all forms of psionics, as well as all fire and heat attacks.



Habitat/Society: The sand worm is a solitary creature that only mates once a year during the heat of summer. During this time as many as 50 of its kind have been seen together, laying upon the sand and bellowing out strange, haunting calls. It is unknown what this unconventional serenade means, but few have been willing to approach these creatures and find out. Those few curious individuals did not return.

Ecology: Sand worms roam the desert in search of prey. Their only reason for existence seems to be to eat. During their travels, small amounts of sand adhere to their sides, strengthening and renewing their hide.

When living food is scarce, the worms have been known to eat rocks, metals, and gems.

Well-armed bands of adventurers hunt the sand worms from time to time, hoping to find a treasure in the creatures' stomachs. The hide of the worm is prized for the armor that can be fashioned from it. The plates provide an AC of 4 and can be enchanted up to a +4 value. However, it is costly and time-consuming to fashion the plates into armor.

The meat of a sand worm is quite delicious. Adventurers who have killed a worm have found that the meat can be preserved with little difficulty, and the meat is easy to dry into a jerky. Fresh sand worm meat commands up to 1 sp per pound, and sand worm jerky up to 4 gp per pound. (These are standard values, on Athas the prices are: meat, 1 bit/pound; jerky 40 cp/pound.)

Silt Weird by Ed Peterson

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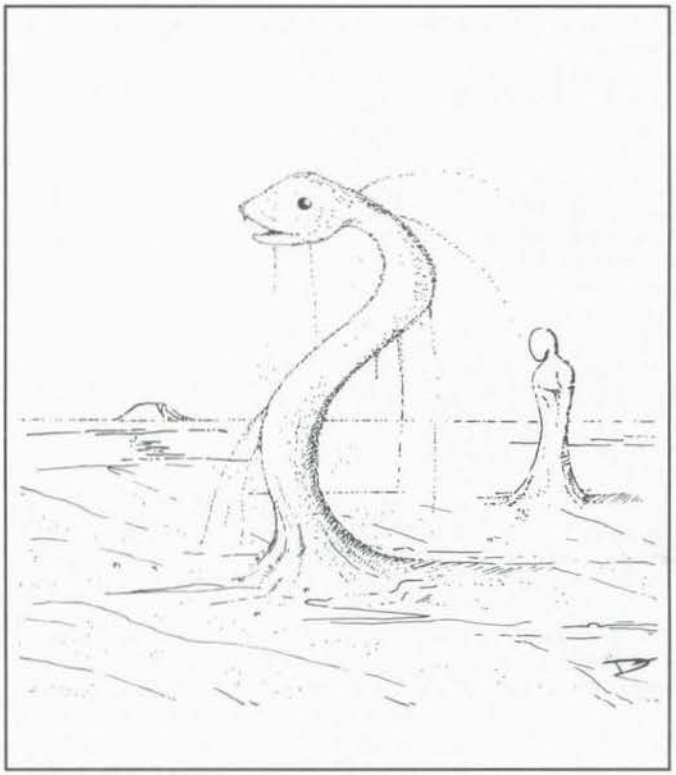
CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Sea of Silt and inland silt basins
FREQUENCY:	Rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Carnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Very (14-15)
TREASURE:	None
ALIGNMENT:	Chaotic evil
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	2
MOVEMENT:	18
HIT DICE:	8+4
THAC0:	13
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	Nil
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Suffocation
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	See below
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	L (30′ long)
MORALE:	Fearless (20)
XP VALUE:	2,000



PSIONICS SUMMARY

Level	Dis/Sci/Dev	Attack/Defense	Score	PSPs
8	1/1/4	EW,PB/IF,TS	14	160

Telepathy—*Sciences:* contact; *Devotions:* ego whip, psionic blast, intellect fortress, thought shield.

Believed to have been birthed in the quasi-elemental plane of dust, the silt weird is a formidable foe of all living creatures. It forms in but a single round from the silt it inhabits. Although it usually takes the shape of a large serpent, it also can form into a vaguely humanoid figure; this has caused it to be confused with a true earth elemental. The creature has been known to use humanoid shapes to lure travelers to their deaths.

Combat: After forming into a serpentine or humanoid shape, the silt weird begins a psionic assault. If these attacks are not enough to finish off the potential meal, the monster next physically lashes out. Any creature struck must make a successful saving throw versus paralyzation or be pulled into the silt. Creatures drawn in the silt will suffocate in 1d4+1 rounds, their life forces being devoured by the weird.

Silt weirds have a special ability which gives them a 50-50 chance to control any earth elemental within 120 yards. Weirds with earth elementals will use these elementals to fight for them, while they remain safe and devour the energy of those who die.

Edged and piercing weapons have no effect on silt weirds; the blades pass harmlessly through the silt. Blunt weapons inflict half damage. Cold-based spells have no effect, and fire-based spells inflict only half damage. The silt weird is immune to all poisons and gasses. A *transmute sand to stone* spell transforms the weird into a 16-hit-die earth elemental. *Transmute rock to mud* instantly kills a weird.

Reducing a silt weird to 0 hit points merely disperses the creature's physical matter; it will reform at full strength in 1d6 rounds.

Habitat/Society: The silt weird is a solitary creature that wanders the Sea of Silt and the inland silt basins hunting for prey. Since the weird's corporeal body is formed from the silt in which it lives, it is unable to travel over land. It is therefore confined to attacking only those creatures that pass within its reach (30 feet).

Silt weirds avoid contact with others of their own kind. The creatures view each other as competition for food and have been known to battle futilely over a section of silt. These fights end in stalemates, as the weirds cannot harm each other. However, one of the weirds eventually goes its own way in search of uncontested food. It is rare to find more than one silt weird in a 10-mile square radius.

Ecology: The silt weird derives its nourishment by absorbing the escaping life force of its suffocating victim. The monster finds conditions on Athas much to its liking, and it thrives in the harsh environment. It is rumored that the border between the silt weird's home, the quasi-elemental plane of dust, and the prime material plane on Athas is tenuous and continually shifting. This enables silt weirds and other denizens of that quasi-plane, such as dune stalkers and sandmen, to enter Athas easily.

The Living Galaxy

Get Down With The Natives: Barbarian Planets, Part 1

by Roger E. Moore

It would be safe to say that most gamers who play in science fiction campaigns cut their teeth on fantasy games, particularly TSR, Inc.'s D&D® and AD&D® games. For them, the vistas of castle-dotted kingdoms and battling armies of knights and wizards have given way to skyscraper-dotted cities and fighting spacecraft. Since some of us can relate just as well to the former as the latter, if not better, why not introduce a few low-technology settings to your science fiction campaign?

Many science fiction games with built-in universes already include planets with low-tech cultures, so this isn't a unique idea. The concept is worth exploring in some depth, however, as there are lots of ways in which a game master can personalize a low-tech planetary setting to produce memorable worlds and adventures for almost any interstellar campaign. This article and several others in the near future will explore different aspects of "barbarian planets," low-tech cultures where life is hard, dirty, and sometimes very short—even for interstellar visitors.

High vs. Low Tech

Some definitions are called for. By "low tech " we mean cultures that lack industrialization and all the trappings of modern technology that we take for granted: cars, computers, medical care, missiles, spacecraft, television, etc. The Industrial Revolution, which began in England about 1760, will serve as our benchmark for when human civilization began evolving into its current high-tech form; the creation of interchangeable machine parts, the mechanization of agriculture, the development of assembly lines, the discovery of atomic power, the appearance of computers, and so forth are considered to be further elaborations on this initial step.

The replacement of hand tools by machines and power tools, concurrent with the establishment of large-scale industrial production, completely altered almost every aspect of human society, politics, economics, and behavior. Guns, food, clothing, lumber, tools, and every other manufactured item could be made in bulk, then widely distributed and sold.

The rift between industrialized and nonindustrialized nations widened, leading to one-sided conflicts as the former cultures dominated, overran, and sometimes wiped out the latter.

"Barbarism" is a crude term that is likely to be applied to low-tech cultures by high-tech interstellar ones, probably with a disdainful sneer. Yet there is generally acknowledged to be a grain of truth in this slur. Barbarism is more than a simple lack of television sets. Without the tools to make clothing, gather food, cure disease, defend against aggressors, or otherwise alter or control the environment, a culture and its people are at the mercy of the uncaring elements. Disease, hurricanes, earthquakes, blizzards, drought, wild animals, and the like will take far greater tolls among peoples who cannot predict, avoid, control, or withstand them.

With death so common an event, great suffering is regarded as unavoidable and "natural"; low-tech life is often filthy, painful, and full of want. Low-tech societies are marked by their concerns over basic survival—food gathering and hunting, finding shelter, life-threatening conflicts with neighbors and wild beasts, and withstanding natural disasters. The world is not safe. There is little time to develop the fine arts and sciences, except in slow, painstaking steps. Physical labor moves the primitive world; machines move the industrial one.

Of course, low-tech cultures are not always warlike and savage, and they are rarely ignorant of all arts and sciences. Industrial peoples are as capable of cruelty as preindustrial ones, and the former have the advantage of high technology and mass production behind

them to spread either wealth or misery worldwide. Low-tech life is not without its comforts and fulfillment, either. Nonetheless, an industrial society freed from questions of immediate survival can better afford to plan for its future and provide for the comfort and long lives of its citizens. A hungry person cannot afford to think of relativistic formulas or classical sculpture—he must think of acquiring food. We too often tend to romanticize the reality of "primitive" life.

As we shall see, not all societies in the far future can be assumed to be high-tech ones. There are many conditions under which low-tech cultures might appear; in some cases, a culture's advancement to a high-tech culture might even be impossible without outside help and time.

Barbarism: How & Why

How can you "realistically" get a low-tech culture in an age when the stars themselves can be reached? Several interstellar game systems have low-tech worlds or nations, many of them human colonies. If you are generating your own sector of space for your campaign, or if you wish to further develop "barbaric" worlds that already exist, here are a few possible ways in which a low-tech world got that way:

1. **No resources:** The culture is low-tech because local natural resources were not available to support an advanced industrial society—and the colonists didn't bring many resources of their own. The world lacks familiar fuel sources such as coal, oil, natural gas, and radioactives, requiring inhabitants to either import their fuel (probably grossly expensive) or rely on less effective sources such as solar, wind, tidal, animal, geothermal, or personal power. Wood could be burned, but at risk of deforesting the landscape if too much wood is needed (it's very inefficient for factory use). Steam engines could be designed, but only if water is available and a heat source can be found (you've got to burn something). Giant solar satellites might broadcast microwave energy to ground stations, but the expense of building these might be prohibitive. If the colony started with very little technological know-how, it will probably be doomed to barbarism for ages, unable to advance beyond a point roughly similar to the European Renaissance period. It is always possible that industrial fuels actually exist somewhere on the planet, but the colony hasn't found or exploited them yet.

This situation is likely to develop on terraformable worlds like Venus and Mars, where no fossil fuels exist. Nuclear fuel and solar-power stations can be imported, but these require high-tech maintenance and could spell disaster for the colony if imported supplies are interrupted or if maintenance is not kept up. If the colony is forced to depend on imports for its existence, it lies at the mercy of the importers. Without a variety of fuels and resources to fall back on in case of disaster, the colony's technology will backslide badly.

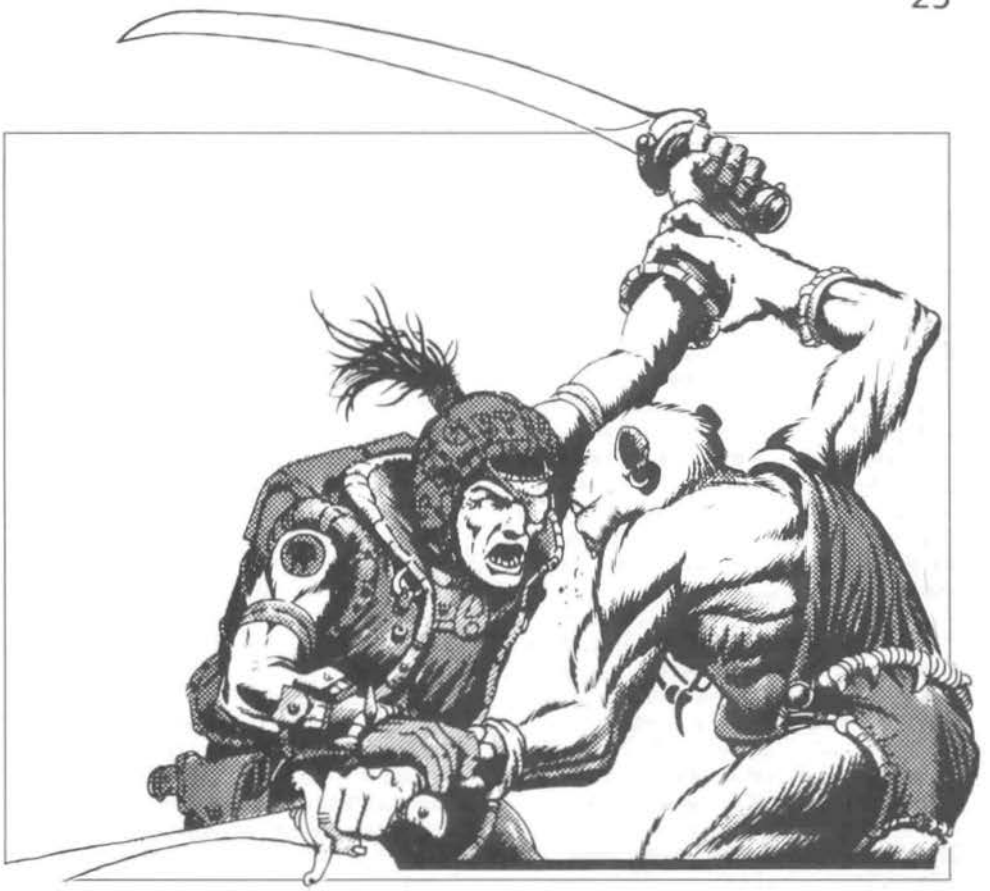
It's unlikely that many colonies would be deliberately established on worlds that could not support a high-tech culture, but unlucky colonists may have no choice. If their starship has dropped them off on a bleak, poorly surveyed world before running out of fuel, that's where they are going to live. Something like this happened to the original colonists on the world Unnight, from the Steve Jackson Games's *GURPS Space* module of the same name; they were left there when their colony ships became lost. Likewise, colonists who settled the worlds in Larry Niven's Known Space tales (turned into the *Ringworld* game from Chaosium, Inc.) often found their homesteads were not at all what they had expected, thanks to incomplete data sent back by robotic explorers. Some of the barbaric inhabitants of the lost starship in Robert Heinlein's *Orphans of the Sky* were lucky enough to escape to a world where they could form a colony, though according to an update in *Time Enough For Love* the colonists had a hard time and became cannibals.

Unwitting colonists might have come to the world for a variety of reasons, meaning to stay only briefly; maybe they were scientists, poachers, smugglers, civilian explorers, military scouts, or miners. However, they were stranded and had to establish a colony when their spacecraft blew up, crash-landed, fell apart, or failed to return from a mission elsewhere. Perhaps they even chose to live on this world to escape persecution if they were political or religious dissidents, war refugees, or criminals; even a bad world is better than none.

There are tales of castaways populating deserted islands in various novels such as *Swiss Family Robinson* and *Robinson Crusoe,* as well as the more modern *Lord of the Flies,* by William Goldman (I'll refrain from mentioning the *Gilligan's Island* TV show more than once). Real-life shipwrecks have also stranded passengers and crew on various islands, usually in the Pacific Ocean. A referee with access to a library should come up with a number of possible beginnings for "accidental colonies."

2. **Technological reversal:** The culture was once more advanced but regressed technologically after a disaster with widespread effects. The original colony was unable to make up its population or industrial losses from the cataclysm that overtook it, and it has been limping along ever since, perhaps growing but at a very slow rate. The disaster might have been sudden (an asteroid or comet strike; global bombardment from spacecraft; cut-off of power from solar-power satellites or an imported power plant) or prolonged (an ice age from solar cooling or vulcanism; global warming from pollution, leading to melting ice caps and flooding; invasion and destruction of a high-tech culture by low-tech peoples). It might have been natural (a pandemic or crop plague; a violent solar flare; an earthquake or hurricane striking a small colony) or man-made (a major nuclear/biological war; pollution leading to ozone failure and ultraviolet saturation); it might even have been a combination of the two (exhaustion of limited fuel sources from poor industrial planning; a famine resulting from climatic change and poor farming procedures). The crisis might be reversible (fuel and food imports were interrupted by warfare or economic embargoes; ecological warfare results fade over time), permanent (genetic warfare has reduced fertility of colonists, leading to low or zero birth rates; a poisonous compound in the soil has impaired mental functioning of colonists, who are generally unaware of their deterioration or cannot escape its effects; solar storms have destroyed all satellites and computer systems, with no chance of repair), or even recurrent (multiple ice ages, meteor strikes, or solar flares over thousands of years). Isaac Asimov's classic short story "Nightfall" presents a curious sort of recurrent natural disaster that game masters should consider.

Historical examples of some of the above disasters are easy to find. Viking colonies in Greenland were wiped out by the "Little Ice Age" of climatic cooling during the Middle Ages. Native American peoples of the Western Hemi-



sphere were decimated and their cultures destroyed by warfare and plague (particularly smallpox) following contact with Europeans. Cuba today is having great trouble keeping up its industrial might in the face of economic blockades and the collapse of the Soviet Union, which supported it. Iraq is still recovering from the bombing and trade embargo it suffered during the Persian Gulf War. The fall of the Roman Empire from invasions and other causes led to the loss of much classical learning, hence the appearance of the Dark Ages in Europe. Some Meso-American city-states were ravaged by internal warfare and overcome by the jungle, their populations dead from starvation or fighting or else scattered—all this centuries before Europeans destroyed what civilizations remained.

In science fiction, one finds many examples of barbarism produced by war (Andre Norton's *Daybreak: 2250 A.D.* and Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*), plague (George Stewart's *Earth Abides*), loss of resources and industrial disasters (Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men*), and so forth. B-grade science fiction movies are full of post-atomic barbarians (with mutants and apes), as are several systems in the science fiction gaming field: TSR's GAMMA WORLD® game, FGU's *Aftermath* rules, and the *Rogue 417* supplement to Tri Tac's alternate-universe *Fringeworthy* game. The world of Portroal, detailed in this column in POLYHEDRON® Newszine issue #59, is an example of a degenerate colony resulting from environmental pressures.

3. **Primitive utopia:** The culture was deliberately established as low-tech for political, religious, or cultural reasons by its own inhabitants, who actively reject high-tech life and all its trappings. A futuristic group of Shakers, neo-Luddites, ecologists, or dedicated frontier types can try to carve out their own niche in the universe, though they would not likely hold out against more powerful opposition from natural forces or high-tech colonies. Colonists might also be the descendants of low-tech peoples on other worlds, particularly Earth, who wish to return to the ways of their ancestors.

Some colonists might be temporary ones, coming to the world to return to primitive ways as a sort of vacation or learning experience relevant to their home societies (think of today's male-oriented Iron Man movement, for instance). Other colonists in this case would be permanent "staff members" of the colony's government.

An interesting variation on this theme would be a group of psychically gifted colonists who have rejected technology in favor of using their psionic talents—magical talents, in essence. An interesting fantasy-like society could be generated under these conditions. Psionic visitors could be recruited for admission to their society, perhaps having to pass lethal trials first to prove themselves. Untalented individuals born into or captured by the society might be slain, cast out, or enslaved (perhaps they've formed their own pro-tech society elsewhere on the planet).

It would be unlikely that an entire world would be turned over to small "primitivist" groups (unless they had a lot of money and political clout), but in science fiction anything is possible. It would be more likely that such groups would inhabit small islands, glens, towns, or other remote areas on "normal" colony worlds, their ranks being filled by disenchanted and adventuresome colonists hoping for a better life. Whether that better life is found is another matter.

In a galactic society, one probably could not count the number of primitivist groups that established colonies on other worlds only to vanish as completely as Sir Walter Raleigh's colony at Roanoke Island, Virginia, in the 1580s. Adventurers would find a thousand local mysteries to occupy their time in tracking down such lost colonies—and the forces that wiped them out. One *Star Trek* TV episode, "The Way to Eden," showed the results of one ill-thought colonial attempt on a paradise world that was incredibly lethal.

4. **Captive culture:** The colony was set up by an outside agency for certain reasons, and it is forcibly kept at a primitive level of technology by that agency, which dominates the world and controls access to and communication with it. We could be talking about a "Devil's Island" penal colony similar to those discussed in this column in issue #73, a permanently quarantined colony for disease victims like those established for lepers in centuries past, a detention colony for people with dangerous or unwanted psionic talents, an enslaved world whose peoples were conquered by a more powerful culture (on-planet or off-planet) and are forced to use low-tech equipment to restrict their native power, or even a "research world" on which colonies of unwitting or unwilling beings (humans, apes, aliens, artificially created beings, etc.) are kept in a low-tech state and subjected to various medical, psychiatric, or

sociological mass experiments by high-tech scientists.

A corporation-owned world or dependent colony might be considered a "captive" culture, but if the inhabitants are free to leave their world as they choose, it is not truly "captive." A captive culture aware of its condition will have lots of buried, frustrated rage, presenting a real danger to its masters once the low-tech peoples manage to get their hands on high-tech weaponry and vehicles—an interesting adventure hook for smugglers and revolutionaries, yes? A viewing of the movie *Escape From New York* is enough to provide some other ideas for getting high-tech adventurers to visit such worlds.

5. **Entertainment park:** The culture was established as a resort or amusement park, either private or public, and is deliberately kept in a low-tech state for its appeal to tourists. The colonists are, in effect, hired workers such as you would find at state or national parks recreating Colonial times in America. Here you have a sort of world-class Dream Park (as per the novel of the same name by Larry Niven and Steven Barnes) on which low-tech locals play out roles for visitors, who might be invited to partake of the low-tech setting for a short time. The colony might also be educational in purpose—a sort of living museum showing the ways of low-tech cultures of other times and places. Low-tech colonies for psionic people might put on "magic shows." Any such colony will probably make money from the sale of local goods and services. Finally, some worlds might have parks in which low-tech survivalist groups might stage prolonged tours of the wilderness for high-paying outdoors types, perhaps training them in paramilitary tactics and even staging animal hunts or war games in which a strong element of danger is present.

High-tech equipment and techniques might be lurking in the background on some worlds, particularly for medical emergencies and law enforcement, though some places may be much "rougher." The notes made earlier about primitive utopias have relevance here, though a utopia exists for the sake of nonmaterial spiritual, political, or cultural goals. A park often exists just to make lots of money!

6. **Still-evolving native culture:** The world is actually settled by humans or nonhumans who have long been native to the world and have not had advanced technology in their history. Worlds to which ancient humans were transported by alien races exist in GDW's *Traveller/MegaTraveller* universe; many of these worlds are still in barbaric states. Low-tech alien races appear in those games and in the rules, supplements, and modules for TSR's STAR FRONTIERS® game, R. Talsorian's *Mekton II* rules, West End Games's *Star Wars: The RPG,* FASA's *Star Trek: The RPG,* Steve Jackson Games's *GURPS Space* system, GDW's *2300 AD* and *Space: 1889* games, and Tri Tac's *Incursion* rules, among others. In any event, such native cultures haven't the foggiest clue that there are other races out there in the universe, but they're due for a big surprise.

The *Star Trek* TV show used to make a big deal out of the way in which more-powerful civilizations should treat low-tech ones, this being the famous Prime Directive (i.e., "Hands off!"). Anyone who watched the show, however, was aware that not even Captain Kirk could keep from messing with low-tech cultures if it suited his purposes; you can scarcely expect any less from space-faring cultures and player characters in any other game system. The impact on a low-tech culture upon meeting a high-tech one for the first time cannot be minimized; witness the whirlwind and irreversible effects, good and evil, that have befallen native groups on our own world upon meeting European settlers and treasure-hunters over the past 500 years. Science fiction writers have long dealt with a similar issue—the meeting of our modern civilization and a *much* more advanced alien one (e.g., Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* and *2001: A Space Odyssey,* or Fritz Leiber's *The Wanderer).*

Even a benevolent super-tech culture would have a devastating impact on us, and a nasty culture would brush us aside as casually as do the Martians in H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds.* Consider this point when moderating encounters of this sort in world-exploration and "first-contact" scenarios, such as in Starchilde's *Justifiers* campaign (which includes low-tech alien races that are brutally used and enslaved by interstellar corporations) or in Stellar Games' *Expendables* system.

7. **"Tech-hostile" environment and racial anatomy:** These two points go together, as a native race will of course have adapted to survive and thrive in its environment, though such adaptations might prevent or hamper the race's ability to reach high-tech levels. An alien race that evolved in an undersea world is not going to learn much about fire, and it will learn even less if it doesn't evolve hands because it needs flippers—witness the fate of the dolphins and other whales of our own world. Aerial creatures living in the immense atmospheres of gas giants (or even the atmospheres of terrestrial worlds, if they never land) would have similar problems, as would burrowing creatures on worlds sleeted with stellar radiation. What about pure-energy beings, too, of the sort found in science fiction the world over? Unless it is psionic, a creature without manipulative limbs is in technological trouble. Larry Niven's Known Space series is populated with various sorts of land-dwelling "handicapped" creatures, such as the immense Bandersnatchi and sessile Grogs.

Aquatic humans, of the sort pictured in fantasy RPGs as mermen or in speculative books like Dougal Dixon's magnificent *Man After Man,* would also have a rough time maintaining a high-tech culture in mildly corrosive seawater (over geologic periods of time, their fingers will probably develop webbing and become paddlelike, too). While their social organizations might be amazingly complex and they might be superb conversationalists, they could easily be overcome by less-intelligent beings having better tools, vehicles, and weapons (again, some would say, witness the fate of the whales).

Creative GM's Notes: There may be other sorts of low-tech origins for worlds and colonies, but I can't think of them right now. To get the ones I had, I simply began to write them down in a notebook as I thought of them—my own "Book of Lists," you might say. I condensed my enormous list into the seven above, which so far seem fairly complete (if you can think of more, tell me!).

If you try this technique, simply pose a question and try to brainstorm an arbitrary number of answers for it (I usually try for 10, but sometimes 20 is better—it strains your brain more). You might be surprised at its effectiveness. I used this technique in writing these articles on barbarians, and we'll continue to see how workable it is. ("Okay, I need . . . twenty reasons why anyone would want to visit a low-tech planet.")

Where The Barbarians Are

A number of interstellar science fiction games could easily include low-tech worlds in their adventure settings; many of these games have already been mentioned. One cannot forget the primitive but clever Ewoks of *Return of the Jedi* and *Star Wars: The RPG,* or the vast numbers of low-tech hominid peoples scattered across the Ringworld of Larry Niven's universe. Barbarians need not be confined to planets, as shown by TSR's old starship-based METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA game (see this column in issue #74 for details).

Some science fiction universes are too young to include low-tech human cultures. Newly settled worlds and space stations in GDW's *2300 AD,* Leading Edge's *Aliens,* TSR's STAR FRONTIERS®, Waterford Publishing's *High Colonies,* and SPI's *Universe* campaigns are unlikely to have spear-toting cavemen as colonists. However, the presence of low-tech alien cultures is another matter, as noted earlier.

Other science fiction role playing games seem to discourage the appearance of low-tech peoples. Cyberpunk games, for example, are intensely high-tech. Even in FASA's *Shadowrun* game, which features orks and trolls, technology is all-pervasive; everyone has guns, radios, implants, and whatnot merely so that they can survive living in such a violent high-tech world. *Mecha*-combat games are also intensely focused on high-tech gear and adventuring; nearly all characters in these campaigns will have a giant combat robot in which to run amok. However, it is always possible for characters in FASA's *BattleTech,* R. Talsorian's *Mekton II,* Palladium's *Robotech,* or Hero Games/ICE's *Robot Warriors* systems to land (or crash) on a low-tech world and be forced to march overland, *mecha*-less, to perform reconnaissance, find or steal spare parts, or recover their stolen/lost *mecha* from secretive high-tech enemies.

Finally, other science fiction campaigns thrive on the appearance of barbaric cultures, being in part founded on them; these often take place entirely on one science-fantasy or post-holocaust world. GDW's *Space: 1889* and *Cadillacs & Dinosaurs* systems, FGU's *Aftermath* game, Palladium's *Rifts* rules, West End Games's *Torg* game, and TSR's GAMMA WORLD game are good examples (the last has a comfortable similarity to the AD&D game, making the barbaric state of mind easier for players to adopt even when their characters clutch laser pistols).

It is vital that, whatever game is used, no two low-tech worlds ever look alike, and that every low-tech world present itself as more than a cheap copy of Conan's Cimmeria. And it helps if the natives present themselves as respectable opponents. I once took part in a *Traveller* adventure on a low-tech world in which our daring semilegal high-tech adventurers were confronted by a squad of marching soldiers using cap-and-ball muskets. What a joke, we thought—until the soldiers opened fire in formation and killed half our group. The GM loved that scenario, boy. Low-tech natives need not have firepower if they have stamina, stealth, determination, energy, and devilishly clever minds. A single "barbaric savage" with a knife and the skills of a ninja and master thief could create unholy havoc in the right place.

The next column will cover the living galaxy's low-tech societies in more detail, and it will answer the question: Where am I going to get the background material to create a lot of low-tech cultures? The answer is: You steal it. (Well, you could just make it up, but stealing it is a lot easier and adds more variety to your campaign, as shall be shown.) See you next month. ❑

With Great Power

Continued from page 8

simply outnumbering the hero with a group of thugs. The archfoe should always be a great challenge to your hero. The other vital element of a nemesis should be the fact that, in some twisted way, the foe is a reflection of the hero. Most of Batman's archfoes are rather unstable mentally. This reflects Batman's own compulsion to fight crime and exact revenge for the loss of his parents. In some of his incarnations (depending on the writer), Bats is downright psychotic about this. My current favorite Spider-Man villain also reflects the hero: Venom. Venom possesses all the same powers that Spidey does, plus Spidey's own Spider-Sense doesn't register Venom's presence. Venom is the force of darkness that Spidey might've become if he had allowed himself to descend into bitterness and spite.

Small villainous groups: Gangs of Maggia or Intergang thugs bristling with weapons are bad enough for most solo heroes, but how about a small group of low-level, super-powered baddies who do their best to make life difficult for the hero. The Sinister Six, a collection of Spider-Man's foes who all want revenge on the web-slinger, is the perfect example of a villainous group. Individually, not one of the villains can stack up to the hero for long, but together is another story. Other possibilities for this type of foe are mutant street gangs, groups of high-tech muggers or bank robbers, super-terrorists, etc.

Other things are also important for a super-solo game GM to remember. With only one player, the game may grind to a halt if the hero misses a vital clue or loses a battle he or she was intended to win. The GM must be ready to keep the game moving forward in case of such an eventuality. A solo campaign also provides many more opportunities for role-playing than in a normal campaign where action is often more important than character development. In a solo campaign, the player can role play to his heart's content, without interference from the other players. The GM should accommodate the hero in this, setting the ratio of role playing to action at a level the player is comfortable with. Watching a hero develop a strong personality over the course of a campaign is one of the most interesting aspects of a solo campaign.

For more inspiration in super-solo campaigns, see the solo-hero comic books themselves. Beyond that, a great source of inspiration on how to structure a super-solo campaign can be found in the animated Batman series on the Fox TV network. I saw some of the animation this past July at the DC Comics' party during the Chicago ComiCon, so I knew that, visually, the show would be quite good. I've been pleasantly surprised to see how well the rest of the show is put together. Pay attention to how each episode's adventure is structured. Note Batman's support network—the cave's equipment, Alfred, Commissioner Gordon, etc. A super-hero game GM could do worse than model the structure of his or her campaign after this excellent program.

If you have any comments regarding what you want to see in this column, write to **With Great Power,** c/o POLYHEDRON® Newszine, P.O. Box 515, Lake Geneva, WI 53147. I am looking forward to hearing from you. ❑

Hey Rocky

Watch Me Pull An Almiraj Out Of My Hat

by Kevin Rau

Some game masters can read through a tournament once and run it. Fewer still can run a scenario without reading anything ahead of time and still manage to do a fabulous job.

The majority of game masters need preparation.

How do you prepare?

When the Scenarios Arrive

The first thing I do is photocopy the tournament; it's easier to use pencils and markers on photocopies than on the computer printout paper that frequently comes from RPGA® Network HQ.

Next, separate the tournament into different rounds, characters, maps and handouts. This makes everything easier to find. You also can quickly tell if you are missing something. Having a good-sized table or desk to work at is beneficial. The bigger the area, the more you can spread everything out. Make sure you save space for rule books and other game aids you might need to reference. And have on hand highlighting markers and pens or pencils.

Now you are ready to read through the scenario. I like starting with the player characters so that I have an idea of what kind of characters are involved—type, level, special skills, abilities, goals, etc. You don't need to learn everything about them right away, but a basic understanding will help when you read through the rounds.

If you are going to run a multi-round tournament, read the rounds in order. Not only does this make for a better story, but you will understand references to previous rounds. As you are reading, jot down any notes, thoughts or questions you have. If something doesn't make sense or if you have questions, note these so you can ask other game masters or your event coordinator at the convention.

Look at any handouts and maps as references to them appear in the text. Each handout should be numbered in the order they are needed. If you find maps that aren't numbered, number them. Also note who the handout or map is for—the GM, all the PCs, a particular PC or both the GM and the PCs. Each time a handout is referenced in the tournament, note right in the scenario what map you should use and who gets to see it. Also check for handouts that are included but are not referenced in the text, and make notes when these should be presented.

The Three Rs: Reading, Reading and Reading

Read the PCs again, starting with the stats. This time, pay more attention to details. Use the rule books to make sure everything is correct. Contrary to popular belief, there are times when things slip by HQ. The PCs may have been written for an older version of the game, the author of the scenario might have used the wrong chart or any number of things could have happened to make the information incorrect. Whatever the reason, double-check all the stats, die rolls, modifiers and other game information. If you find a major mistake, notify HQ as soon as possible and send them a corrected copy. That way the next time the tournament is used, HQ can send out the correct information.

Next, go over the descriptions of each PC and the characters' relationships with each other. Jot down any thoughts you have when you are reading. Does a character have a phobia or do they dislike something about another character? How do the PCs relate to different types of NPCs? These are just some of the points to look for when reading. These things could be important during various encounters in the tournament.

Read the scenario again. This time, highlight the passages you want to read to the players. Highlighter markers are perfect for this, as you can find the material with ease. If some of the text sounds awkward, don't be afraid to paraphrase it.

If you find game-mechanic questions while reading, consult the rules now. When you find your answer, note it in the margin of the tournament. This way, when you come across the puzzling passage again you will have both your question and the answer in one place.

Now is a good time to practice any voices and role playing you want to do with NPCs. Note next to specific characters any mannerisms or speech patterns you want to give them.

When you're done reading the tournament for the second time, read it again. This time pay close attention to the encounters. What is each setting like? Do the PCs have equipment that could come in handy during specific encounters? Are there NPCs involved? Do any special game rules apply? These are some of the questions you must ask as you read through the encounters. Also at this time you should check the statistics of NPCs and monsters to make sure the information is complete.

Combat is an important part of many tournaments, and being familiar with potential skirmishes will help the tournament run more smoothly.

Decide how you want to handle each fight. In most cases, the maps supplied with the tournament are not large enough to move miniatures across for positioning. If you have a battlemat, a large section of vinyl that can be drawn on, plan to bring it to the convention. If not, plan on using one of several other ways for running combat with visual aids. For example, you can either draw the area the PCs will be fighting in on a large piece of paper and keep it with the scenario, or you might plan to use books and other objects at the convention to set up boundaries for the battle scene. Bring extra dice with you, because if the players do not have lead miniatures, you can use dice to represent their characters or NPCs and monsters.

If the tournament does not detail a combat strategy for the NPCs or monsters, develop one.

When you feel you have a good grasp of the tournament encounters, its time to check magic items, proficiencies of the PCs and NPCs and spells.

Often a tournament will detail actions the PCs might take and suggestions for responding. However, the authors cannot predict all the actions. Look for things that the players might do with their characters that the tournament does not cover, and consider options for handling the situation. That way, you will be ready for most things, and you will be less likely to have something unexpected happen to you. ❑

Into The Dark

Oh No! There Goes Tokyo!

by James Lowder

Most Asian giant monster films have the same basic appeal as WWF wrestling: you know the good guys from the bad guys at a glance.

Not surprisingly, audience reaction to "monster stomp" films tends to be extreme. People either love to see Godzilla ("Gojira" to his true fans) melt plastic tanks or they don't. These same folks undoubtedly also enjoy the Marvel monster comics of the 60s, which introduced such memorable creations as Tim Boo Ba, Kraa the Unhuman, and Zzutak, the Thing that Shouldn't Exist! After two years of this column (and my recent article in DRAGON® magazine), you can guess which camp I call home.

The guys-in-rubber-suits subgenre is more expansive than American filmgoers tend to think. There exists a broad range of Asian super-monster films, from the outstanding early efforts from Toho Studios—home of Godzilla, Varan, Rodan, and Ghidorah—to the laughable Gamera series from rival Japanese studio, Daiei. The current batch of Godzilla flicks, including the recent *Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah* (the 18th film in the series), are entertaining science fiction tales.

This month our tour takes us from Monster Island all the way to Nebula M78. Please keep your hands inside the car; the giant radioactive lizards tend to be a bit grumpy until they've wiped out their first city of the day....

You can't get any better *****
Entertaining and enjoyable ****
There are worse films ***
Wait for cable **
A waste of good tape *

Godzilla Raids Again

1955, 78 Minutes
Toho/Warner
Director: Moyotoshi Oda
Cast: Hiroshi Koizumi, Minori Chiaki, Yoshio Tsuchiya
***

Despite the fact Godzilla was annihilated by Dr. Serizawa's oxygen destroyer at the end of *Gojira*, Toho quickly cooked up this sequel. The monster is not Godzilla, but another fire lizard of the same species. He squares off against Angilas, a spiny ankylosaurus, that trundles about on all fours, trashing buildings with its tail and horned snout.

Pilots Tsukioka (Hiroshi Koizuni) and Kobayashi (Minoru Chiaki) spot Godzilla and Angilas duking it out on barren Iwato Island. The monsters leave the island and head toward Osaka, where there are lots more people to stomp and buildings to topple. Once inside Osaka Harbor, the monsters resume their brawl. Godzilla savagely kills Angilas, and the military is left to face off against the King of the Monsters.

The Japanese release, *Gojira Raids Again*, is much more entertaining than this Americanized version. It gives more screen time to Yoshio Tsuchiya (of Kurosawa's *The Seven Samurai* and *Yojimbo*) as fighter pilot, Tajima. The U.S. release, also known as *Gigantis, the Fire Monster* or *Godzilla's Revenge*, is butchered in other ways, too. In the military briefing scene, the absurd history of Earth's fiery origin was added as a prologue to the footage of Godzilla from the first movie. New voice-over narration (by veteran star Keye Luke) and lots of silly stock footage of everything from people praying in various temples to an animated representation of Japanese mobilization in WWII, were tacked on to the story.

The worst indignity heaped upon *Gojira Raids Again* during its Americanization was the awful script/translation by Hugo Grimaldi. No, the original is not as ridiculous, with voice-over narration that explains every shot or characters who can't open their mouths without saying something stupid. These additions were intended to make the film more palatable in the States. Warner Brothers certainly has a high opinion of its home audience, don't they?

Godzilla vs. Megalon

1976, 80 Minutes
Toho
Director: Jun Fukuda
Cast: Katsuhiko Sasaki, Hiroyuki Kawase
**

Many hardcore Godzilla fans consider 1964's *Mothra against Gojira* (known in the States as *Godzilla vs. the Thing*) the last serious entry in the series. Those same people often point to *Godzilla vs. Megalon* as a prime example of how the series went wrong.

It is, by anyone's standards, a laughable story. Annoyed by all the nuclear testing going on over their heads, the Seatopians, who dwell in a futuristic city beneath the ocean floor, unleash a giant radioactive cockroach named Megalon. The nasties also plot to steal a robotic Ultraman rip-off named Jet Jaguar from its creator. With Jet Jaguar to lead the mindless Megalon, the very European Seatopians hope to stomp Tokyo and the surrounding countryside flat.

The holes in the plot are big enough for even Godzilla to jump through without ducking. Why should the advanced folks of Seatopia steal a robot, you ask? Why not make their own? "We don't have the time to invent them," the villain explains. "Oh, yeah," our intrepid scientist-hero retorts. "You mean you're too dumb." And off the two go, into a badly choreographed fistfight, proving the two of them are none too bright.

As in all the 70s Godzilla films, the big green guy serves mankind as a radioactive bodyguard. After appearing briefly in the opening minutes of the film, Godzilla cools his heels off-camera on Monster Island, waiting for Jet Jaguar to break free of Seatopian domination. About halfway through the flick, the robot flies off to request Godzilla's assistance. Finally, after we watch Jet Jaguar program itself to grow huge (yeah, right) and go a few rounds with Megalon, Godzilla plods ashore to save the day.

But wait! The Seatopians have called upon their allies in the Starhunter M Universe, who send the monster Gigan to stop Godzilla. Of course, the film's finale is the standard tag team bout, complete with Gigan and Megalon giving each other the high five after slam dunking one of the good guys.

All the other Godzilla film cliches are here, as well: the shots of people evacuating Tokyo, the march of the toy tanks and model jets, the cute little boy who we all hope gets squashed flat by the evil monster...everything that gives the

subgenre its bad reputation.

Gamera vs. Guiron

1969, 82 Minutes
Daiei
Director: Noriaki Yuasa
Cast: Nobuhiro Kazima, Miyuki Akiyama, Christopher Murphy
***1/2**

Hoo boy. There's a reason why each of the Gamera films has been lampooned on *Mystery Science Theater 3000.*

Created by the folks at Daiei in 1965 to capitalize on the success of rival Toho's Godzilla series, Gamera quickly became the star of a string of cloying and inane science fiction epics. Whereas Godzilla slipped unhappily into his role as protector of mankind and friend to children, Gamera the mutant turtle took that unpleasant mantle on his rough shell with pleasure. The resulting films are unbelievably silly.

In *Gamera vs. Guiron*, two young boys discover a spaceship. When they climb in, it takes off. Gamera tries to save the brats, but the ship speeds away, bringing them eventually to Terra, a planet that spins in Earth's orbit, but on the exact opposite side of the sun. Here, they are menaced by groovy space women in spandex, who intend to use the kids for rations on their trip to Earth.

Unfortunately, Gamera lands on Terra before the aliens can do in Akiro and Tom. The turtle dukes it out with Guiron, a monstrous lizard with a scalpel for a snout, and the boys outsmart the young women. Everyone returns to Earth safely, where the boys proclaim there's no place like home. Roll credits.

Above all the silliness, though, *Gamera vs. Guiron* has a number of unintentionally dark, rather twisted moments. In a warm-up battle between Guiron and the batlike Space Gaos, the scalpel-headed monster cuts off its foe's wings, then laughs and proceeds to chop up the downed Gaos like a carrot. And when the boys first arrive on Terra, one alien notes happily to the other, "While they are sleeping, we'll eat their brains raw!" If this is supposed to be a joke, I think it lost something in the translation....

Yongary—Monster from the Deep

1969, 79 Minutes
American International/Orion
Director: Kim Ki-Duk
Cast: Oh Young Il, Nam Chung-Im
****

If for no other reason, you should watch *Yongary* so you can say you've seen a Korean film. There really isn't much beyond that to recommend this sad Godzilla rip-off.

A young married couple, a scientist with a light ray that makes people itch, a mischievous (read as "annoying") kid, and a nuclear test in the Middle East. Toss 'em together, add one fire-breathing lizard intent on stomping Seoul, and you've got the story for *Yongary—Monster from the Deep.* The details? Well, just come up with a list of monster movie cliches and you'll be right on track.

The monster faces off against toy tanks, crushes balsa buildings, and generally runs amuck. The scientists and military types flip-flop between planning the next attack and wondering aloud what they've done to bring the wrath of the gods down upon their civilization. The obnoxious kid discovers the secret of destroying the oil-drinking monster—a chemical that basically gives him terminal dermatitis—and everyone is sad at the end because Yongary had to die, even though he didn't really mean to hurt anyone.

The acting is above average for newer monster epics, and the dubbing is surprisingly good. A few unexpected twists lurk along the way: A group of drunken kids nihilistically dance the night away in a disco right in Yongary's path. When told to run for the hills, someone finally asks what's supposed to happen if the monster goes to the hills, too! But these are only glimmers of originality. The rest of *Yongary* treads along firmly in Godzilla's sizeable footprints.

Ultraman: Towards the Future

1991, 30 Min/Episode
Bandai
Director: Andrew Prowse
Cast: Dore Krause, Gia Carides, Ralph Cotterill
*****

Chances are, some of you haven't heard of Ultraman, but in parts of the world, the various Ultra Series are as well-known as the Star Trek films and television shows in the States. Recently, though, Tsuburaya Productions have set their sights on introducing the famous monster-fighters to America. The television series "Ultraman: Towards the Future" spearheads the invasion.

The premise for each Ultra Series has remained basically the same since the debut of "Ultraman" in July 1966: a heroic Earthman becomes, through accident or design, the partner of a being from the M78 Nebula. Together, they fight the giant monsters that threaten the world, eventually foiling the plot of some great evil menace controlling the destructive beasts. "Ultraman: Towards the Future" is no exception.

On Mars, astronauts Jack Shindo and Stanley Haggart discover the giant space monster Goudes. In a battle with the creature, Haggart is apparently killed. Shindo is about to share his partner's fate when a mysterious alien appears and defeats Goudes. The alien—Ultraman—then merges with Shindo and heads to Earth, where the Goudes's energy has spread, creating or reviving other monsters.

Along with the members of the multinational UMA (Universal Multipurpose Agency), Shindo/Ultraman fights the Goudes menace wherever it appears. As you might expect, each episode of this television series centers on Ultraman battling a beastie. The special effects featured in this Japanese-Australian production are quite good, and the acting is top-notch. Krause is the perfect choice for Jack Shindo, and Ralph Cotterill plays the enigmatic Colonel Arthur Grant, leader of the UMA, with loads of growling enthusiasm.

The series is still floating around in syndication in various parts of the country, usually in early-morning time slots. It's definitely worth a look. If you can't find it on television, watch for videos at game conventions. A continuation of the series is planned, so the old episodes (and perhaps even the previous Ultra Series) might find their way into your living room soon.

For fans of Godzilla and Gamera films, check out Dark Tower's relatively unknown giant creature battlegame, *Monsters!* The game includes a heavily illustrated rulebook in which the monsters explain the system, and a reprint of the B&W comic, *Daikazu.* You might also be interested in the line of toys being released in conjunction with the new Ultraman series, including plastic monsters and a city playset for them to destroy.

❑

Letters

Continued from page 5

veterans refused to run the feature scenario you mentioned. They said it didn't have enough role-playing elements and therefore they would get a lousy DM™ score. It's people like you who proved them wrong and helped provide four hours of fun for the players.

The Network wants good game masters. And quality isn't necessarily a reflection of age.

Problem Game Masters

At the 1992 GEN CON®/ORIGINS™ Game Fair, a veteran group of players and I were burned by a GM in the AD&D® Game Open second round. He came to the event 35 minutes late, never read the adventure before the event, and was hostile toward our group.

I suggest the RPGA Network come up with a blacklist for GMs who perform poorly. You need to have a secret ballot for this to work and to properly weed out unfair and incompetent GMs.

Also, I was displeased with your Living City events. Now you allow players to show up with whatever character they can make up, without Network HQ keeping them on file.

Let's face it; just because someone is an RPGA Network member doesn't mean they are necessarily honest, fair, and courteous. If you, as a Network, are going to sponsor something, I sure hope you do it right.

Darrin Anderson
Princeton, IL

We're sorry you had a bad experience with one of the game masters at the Game Fair. When you are dealing with literally hundreds of game masters at a convention the size of the GEN CON Game Fair, it is impossible to know the abilities of each judge.

However, it is important to the Network that we have good judges for sanctioned events, and we pay attention to all letters received that cite problems with game masters. Further, we read through the tournament result sheets where players can comment on the scenario and the judge. And we watch the judge scores that are compiled for each session.

We don't have a "blacklist" per se, Darrin, but we keep a list of GMs with exceptionally high scores and low scores. In some instances we work with game masters who have low scores, giving them suggestions on how to improve. If we see no progression in such a GM's scores, we don't schedule him or her at conventions where we have a direct involvement until we know the judge has improved.

Looking over the results from this past year's Game Fair, we saw there were less than a dozen GMs with wretched scores. That's pretty good when you consider that we use about 300 GMs.

There are cases of isolated bad scores. Veteran GMs can simply have bad days. And there are many other factors that contribute to DM scores. For example, at one east coast convention a few years ago I ran a James Bond tournament and received very mediocre scores. On every sheet, the players cited their disappointment with the crowded convention facilities and the noise level. The other DMs and I couldn't do anything about the facilities, but we weathered the players' disappointment.

The best thing players can do to improve the quality of judges at Network events is to take time and jot comments on the score sheet about a judge's performance. Our judges read those sheets, and such advice can help them. Players also can try their hand at judging to see what it's like on the other side of the table.

We always do have a few unprepared judges. This almost always happens because we don't get enough judges signing up early on. For example, we start mailing scenarios for the Game Fair in late June/early July. That means a prospective judge has to return his or her paperwork by about Memorial Day, and it's much easier on the HQ staff if a judge volunteers earlier than that—now would be a good time.

As for the Living City. We are still keeping characters on file, but we are getting too many participants at conventions to accurately keep track of the characters, or to locate characters for players who forget their sheets. However, a few stalwart members from time to time go through our copies of the character sheets and pull out suspect characters—characters that have too many points in their attribute scores and too much magic. Those characters are adjusted. Further, we have a list of all the magic items awarded during Living City tournaments and of the items characters purchased from magic shops run at shows such as the WINTER FANTASY Convention. If a character has something not on that list—whoosh! It gets zapped off the character sheet.

This spring we will run a Living City character sheet and directions, so you can start your own character and play him or her in Network-sponsored LC tournaments. ❑

The Everwinking Eye

Continued from page 7

Ogres, trolls, and goblinkin still inhabit the western slopes of these mountains, and few humans venture closer than necessary.

Caravans from Thentia bear westward toward Melvaunt (or make a stopover at that city) before heading north. They seldom turn east again until they reach a landmark in desolate Thar known as Giant's Head Rock (for its shape), to reach Glister.

The Witch-King of Vaasa proved an uncomfortable neighbor to Thar, but his forces—or elements of them, in the chaos that followed his downfall—did not reach through the pass to seize Glister.

Perhaps this peace lasted because one resident of the frontier trading-post settlement is the great archmage Thusk Tharmuil (CN hm W24). Thusk breeds wolves who ably defend the town from the frequent orc and goblin raids, while leaving humans untouched.

Thusk once led an adventuring band known as The Company of the Cat. Several of his former adventuring companions dwell in Thentia and Melvaunt, and occasionally accompany caravans and mining explorers from those cities back and forth across Thar. They could well be expected to protect their interests and aid Thusk by fielding mercenary armies if Glister was threatened.

Thusk's old comrades include Ghoran 'Greatleap' Bhinduth (NE hm T17), Multhran Brokenshield (CN hm F14), and Jhaness 'She-Wolf' Lhasprair (CG hf F12).

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YOU IDIOT! HE'S NOT COMING BACK! HE'S GONE AND LEFT YOU HOLDING THE BAG!!
@#☆!!?!@
YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO WATCH THAT MOUTH OF YOURS NOW THAT YOU'RE AN EXHIBIT IN THE GALACTIC ZOO!